

PERFORMING ISLAM THROUGH INDONESIAN POPULAR MUSIC, 2002-2007

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A growing body of scholarship examines the diverse and new ways that popular music is used as a vehicle for Islamic discourse in contemporary Indonesian society. This dissertation compares three modern leaders who place their music within their own ideological context through non-musical discourse. K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) is a preacher in Bandung whose music attempts to bring together Arabic traditions and optimistic practical advice; his piece “Jagalah Hati” shares in the theology of the Islamic philosopher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and represents the “Managemen Qolbu” philosophies of his pesantren Daarut Tauhiid, a center for the nasyid musical style. Ahmad Dhani is a rock musician of the Jakarta band Dewa 19, who refashioned himself as a spiritual leader in order to oppose radical Islam through Islamic rock music; his songs “Satu” and “Laskar Cinta” clearly reference the philosophies of the Indonesian Sufi saint Syekh Siti Jenar. Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun) is a writer in Yogyakarta who uses a modern revamping of traditional Javanese music in eclectic and philosophical community gatherings with his gamelan ensemble Kiai Kanjeng; their pieces “Gundul Pacul” and “Iilir-Iilir,” examples of Islamic fusion, are analyzed with reference to Cak Nun’s prose writings “Menyorong Rembulan dan Matahari Berkabut” and “Gundul Pacul, ‘Fooling Around,’ Cengengesan.” This dissertation also describes the work of other Islamic musicians in Indonesia, including Snada, Bimbo, Edcoustic, Ungu, Letto, Gigi, MQ Voice, and The New MQ Voice.

The three spiritual leaders use their music to fuel an Islamic revival in Indonesia that can be called Sufi. Their definitions of Sufism vary, but all are attempting to spur a discussion of Islam that is meaningful for Indonesians. By performing Islamic music, musicians teach their listeners about their own understandings of the religion and in effect are “performing Islam.” This dissertation explores the musicians’ theosophic associations, their ideas of how their music can be conceived of as both local and universal, and their roles as civic leaders.

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## **PREFACE**

The process of preparing this document has given me countless opportunities for experiencing gratitude. Thank you to all of my professors who have guided me along the way, to each one of my friends both near and far, to my family, to the staff members at each of the universities and grant facilities that supported my research, and to all those who shared their time with me to discuss this project. Thanks especially to my father and mother, both of whom taught me that life is too important not to enjoy it and that with a little will and perserverence, anything can be accomplished.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Islamic popular music has had an increasing presence in Indonesia since the late 1990s. While a variety of musical styles can be considered “Islamic popular music,”<sup>1</sup> each has at its basis a shared musical language with Western popular music and ideological inspiration in Islam. The combination of these two elements has aroused an energetic discourse among musicians and their listeners, not only regarding their professional and creative differences, but also through the consideration of the deeper theological meaning of their musical activity and its role in contemporary Indonesia. Ethnomusicologist Jeremy Wallach alerts his readers to one layer of complexity in this discussion, that different musical styles in Indonesia are oftentimes associated with social stratification. In particular, Western popular music and similarly produced Indonesian popular music are both connected with sophistication and personal pride (*gengsi*), while more hybridized popular music genres that contain local, Middle-Eastern, South Asian, and Euro-American influences, and *musik daerah* (regional styles) have subordinate prestige and

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<sup>1</sup> While I am aware that such a term may be considered inappropriate by those who do not believe that there is such a thing as “Islamic music,” my research suggests that this term is most descriptive of what the artists represented in this study believe they were creating. Most of the musicians I interviewed during the course of my research referred to their music as either “pop religius” (religious pop) or “pop Islami” (Islamic pop). Similar categories existed on the shelves of Indonesian music stores. However, none of these categories identifies a well-defined music genre, nor is there an equivalent Islamic popular music genre that I am aware of in the English language. Each of the musical styles that I discuss in this dissertation is loosely described as being both “popular music” and “Islamic”; therefore, I define these musical styles as belonging to a general genre of “Islamic popular music.” I apologize if the term offends any reader; this was not my intent. Although this terminology, and the decision-making behind my choosing it, is not the focus of my dissertation, the specifics of each musical style represented in this study will be discussed more fully below, especially in each individual chapter.

are associated with “lower class” sentiments.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, in her writing about the increased practice of veiling in late twentieth-century Indonesia, which I find resonates with many of the musical Islamic practices discussed in this dissertation, the anthropologist Suzanne Brenner offers some ways in which new Islamic practices are indicative of a “vision of modernity that is also conceived in contrast to Western models—an alternative modernity... By identifying with the international Islamic community, Indonesian activists validate their sense of being part of the modern world without the need to adopt a Westernized way of life; for many Indonesians that lifestyle lacks morality and religious faith and is materialistic and self-indulgent.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the fusing of Western popular music—which has come to represent a dominant global ideology in Indonesia—with Islam innately positions the artist at the center of an ongoing national debate, as the country negotiates between its identities as a democratic, capitalist nation and home to the world’s largest Muslim population.

Through musical practice and discourse, Indonesian Islamic artists engage in the public expression of religious values and also help in their creation, with the intention of powerfully impacting communal and individual understandings of religion and morality.<sup>4</sup> During Islamic popular-music events, artists and organizers collaborate in the creation of socially conscious atmospheres that encourage audiences to connect their renewed inner spirituality with communal awareness. These multiple layers of meaning are revealed through visual and aural cues at a performance, and reinforced through deeper musical and theological analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Wallach, “Exploring Class, Nation, and Xenocentrism in Indonesian Cassette Retail Outlets,” *Indonesia* 74, no. 3 (2002): 79-102.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Brenner, “Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and ‘the Veil,’” *American Ethnologist* 23 (1996): 674-8.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffers Engelhardt offers an alternative cultural discussion on religion and morality when he writes how “‘right singing’ necessitates hearing, thinking and writing about musical and social processes” in ways that are socially transformative in the Estonian Orthodox church. Jeffers Engelhardt, “Right Singing in Estonian Orthodox Christianity: A Study of Music, Theology, and Religious Ideology,” *Ethnomusicology* 53, no. 1 (2009): 51.

These elements were all present in the first Islamic popular music concert that I attended, in a Jakarta public school in June of 2005. Nearly a hundred children attended, all in their school uniforms, some of the girls wearing a Muslim headscarf with their outfit. The concert hall appeared to be a classroom, now temporarily converted into an auditorium. Nine ranks of folding chairs behind one row of comfortable, cushioned seats (ostensibly for the honored guests) each pointed towards a makeshift stage, over which hung the words in Bahasa Indonesia:<sup>5</sup> “Congratulations and Success / Islamic Pop Concert Cares for our Nation’s Children / Keep Up Your Schooling!”<sup>6</sup> Without prompting, the attendees divided according to age and gender: boys sat in the first rows of folding chairs, and girls behind them. I joined the adults in the last two rows. As we listened to the chatter of the children, my companion<sup>7</sup> translated what the three girls in front of us were saying: “They’re looking forward to seeing one of the performers, Opick; he’s a rock star.” Though we didn’t know who Opick was at the time, the girls’ gestures and rapid conversation filled us with a sense of excitement.

The concert started at seven in the evening, with the first hour consisting solely of a lengthy lecture. The event organizer, a middle-aged woman from the *Yayasan Sekolah Rakyat* (People’s School Foundation),<sup>8</sup> filled the time with a serious discussion about the difficulties facing many urban youth in attending school. She said that the children present were extremely lucky to attend school, especially since the alternative was a sentence of life-long poverty and the very real possibility of gang membership. She cited a number of alarming statistics about the

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<sup>5</sup> Bahasa Indonesia is the national language of Indonesia, created from a Malay trading language during the formation of the nation, and again revised in the late 1970s. It functions as a lingua franca, as most Indonesians are bilingual, speaking one of over three hundred *bahasa daerah* (regional languages); the largest of these is *Basa Jawa* (Javanese).

<sup>6</sup> “Selamat & Sukses / Pentas Nasyid Peduli Anak Negri / Ayo Tetap Sekolah!” Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author’s.

<sup>7</sup> Mohamad Yusuf, at the time a graduate student at the central Javanese university, Gadjah Mada.

<sup>8</sup> The practice throughout this dissertation will be to present foreign words the first time only in italics, followed by my translation in English.

rise in suicides by children who could not afford the admission fees for even a basic education. As her speech carried on, my eyes wandered about the room, and I took in the disinterested expressions of these well-behaved children. They smiled when she announced that her institution was providing each of the children in attendance with a gift bag that included pencils and two lined notebooks. Group pictures were taken (figure 1), after which the musicians were finally invited onstage.



**Figure 1. Children receiving gifts before concert, Jakarta 2005**

When the musicians arrived, the scene transformed. Six young men who appeared to be in their early twenties lined up onstage, sporting nearly matching clothes: long pants, shoes, a black jacket and blue collared shirt (figure 2). Clean-cut and each holding a microphone, they began to sing in consonant harmony. The one in the middle took the lead vocals, while his

companions harmonized “oohs” and “ahs” beneath the melody, only joining in with the lyrics on the chorus, also in harmony. They did not use instruments; their entire set consisted of unaccompanied singing in a doo-wop style. The lyrics preached morals that matched the tone of the event organizer’s earlier speech: always try your best; don’t judge others; read the Qur’an; pray. But this time, the children were smiling, enlivened, and swaying their heads from side to side with the music.



**Figure 2. Nasyid<sup>9</sup> performance, Jakarta 2005**

A second group followed in a similar style, and both bands were ushered off the stage amidst cheers and applause. The third singer, Opick, was different; he was alone and wore a simple, tight-fitting necklace underneath his otherwise casual but conservative dress, with a small green peci<sup>10</sup> atop his head (figure 3). Instead of singing a cappella, he was accompanied by a cassette with synthesized instrumentals and occasionally what sounded like a male choir. Each of Opick’s three songs was followed by successively louder applause. When he finished his final

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<sup>9</sup> Style of music, which will be discussed further below, and more extensively in chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> Indonesian Muslim cap, usually black.

number, “Tombo Ati” (Javanese song, meaning “Heart Medicine”), the event ended as the children rushed out of their seats to take their picture with him and ask for his autograph, which he graciously gave.



**Figure 3. Opick, Jakarta 2005**

[To listen to his song, refer to the attached sound file, Opick\_TomboAti.mp3.]

The night’s performance was clearly designed to celebrate the children’s school successes and entertain them with a wholesome musical experience. But more than mere entertainment, the event was educational. The representative for the People’s School Foundation instructed the students about contemporary social conditions through her discussion of the dismal status of urban education, and the musicians taught the audiences ways to respond internally to

these injustices, through moral thinking according to Islamic principles. “Be aware, help when you can,” the speaker seemed to say, to which the music lyrics responded: “Fix yourself first.” Acceptable role models were provided in the form of young male singer-preachers, whose musical product was packaged for a youthful generation. These musicians sang in a pop musical style, though modified to exclude instruments,<sup>11</sup> and they loaded their lyrics with Islamic messages that seemed to support the messages of their teachers.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the organization of the event seemed to encourage certain behaviors that upheld standards of decorum, deemed fitting for a religious concert: the boys and girls divided the space by gender; the bands wore conservative, matching clothing; and the physical demonstrations of the audience were confined to swaying the head, rather than dancing in the aisles. I found myself asking if this style of religious music inspired a particular vision about how Islam could be performed. I wondered, how critical were these extra-musical testimonials that seemed to advocate for social and inner reform.<sup>13</sup>

Some time afterwards, I became aware of another layer of meaning that had been present at that evening’s performance. This element had been carefully nuanced into the music, and only became evident to me after a closer examination of one of the artist’s discourses surrounding his

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<sup>11</sup> Some, though not all, Muslims believe that instruments are an inappropriate mode of religious expression. For more on the complexities of the subject, see Amnon Shiloah, *Music in Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), in which he discusses several possible origins of the controversial nature of musical instruments in religious expression through reference to Muslim myths, religious scriptures, and the histories of early Muslim civilizations.

<sup>12</sup> By basing their musical style on trends in the secular music industry in an innovative way that carefully upholds the moral standards of their audience’s parents, Islamic popular musicians cater to the unique needs of Generation Y, or those people who came of age at the turn of the twenty-first century. Anthony Fung has written a related and interesting study on how contemporary artists attempt to achieve this balance between “the cool” and parental acceptance in China. He writes that this “cool” generation “consumes cultural products, brandnames, and current styles to highlight their unique identity yet continues to need approval from society, parents and teachers.” Fung, “Western Style, Chinese Pop: Jay Chou’s Rap and Hip-Hop in China,” *Asian Music* 39, no. 1 (2008): 72.

<sup>13</sup> In many ways, living in Indonesia is communal, emphasizing family and society over the needs of the individual. I use the term “inner reform” to indicate the highly personal transformation that accompanies spirituality (*batin*), as opposed to “outer reform” which occurs at the societal level (*reformasi*). This distinction is necessary, and will become an emphasis later in this dissertation, as many of the individuals discussed believe that is only through “inner” change that “outer” change can occur.

musical compositions. Opick, in his autobiography (2006), states that the final song of that evening's performance, "Tombo Ati"<sup>14</sup> (Heart Medicine), is the composition of an early Javanese saint, Sunan Bonang. Inasmuch as "Tombo Ati" is a folk song, commonly performed in Islamic music events, I had become aware of many narratives of the song's history, especially the most widely asserted one that it was a nineteenth-century Javanese translation of an Arabic poem. It intrigued me that Opick chose to associate this song with exclusively Indonesian origins. Especially since this mystical saint's historical authenticity is shrouded in miracle and legend, the claim seemed at odds with the more "scripturalist" image that Opick portrayed: a man who wore conservative Islamic dress and was famous for always performing the prescribed prayers at the necessary times, even when he was a secular rock singer.<sup>15</sup>

During an interview at his Jakarta home in 2007, Opick stated that while he himself could not claim to be a follower of mystical Islam (it was up to others to conclude this by his actions), he considered all of his compositions to be to some extent Sufi (*Sufistik*).<sup>16</sup> Sufism, commonly defined as Islamic mysticism, is a way of practicing Islam that emphasizes inner spirituality; its historical legitimacy as an Islamic practice in Indonesia will be discussed further below. When I pressed him to continue, Opick supported his claim by stating that each of his songs shared the

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<sup>14</sup> The original title of the song in Javanese is "Tombo Ati." However, many artists have also translated the song into the Indonesian language (which will be discussed further in the conclusion of the dissertation) as "Obat Hati." Both names mean "Heart Medicine," or "Medicine of the Heart."

<sup>15</sup> Agus Idwar Jumhadi (producer, Nadahijrah, Forte Entertainment), in discussion with the author, June 2007. Idwar told me his version of the events of Opick's crossover from performing secular to religious music. According to Idwar, it was his idea for Opick to perform "Tombo Ati." Idwar was compiling a religious album *Tausiyah Dzikir & Nasyid* (2004), and needed one more track to complete the album. Opick, after releasing nine unsuccessful secular albums, was being dropped from Forte Records as a client. However, Idwar thought that because Opick appeared to be such a religious person (which he determined from Opick's dress and regularly scheduled prayers), he might be well suited to writing the final song for this particular album. Idwar asked Opick to record his own version of "Tombo Ati" for inclusion. The song was an immediate success and Opick was re-signed in the religious division of Forte Records, Nadahijrah, where he has been performing religious popular music and recording ever since.

<sup>16</sup> Opick [Aunur Rofiq Lil Firdaus], in discussion with the author, July 2007.



trait of love.<sup>17</sup> Though many religions and philosophies believe that love is an important underlying concept, it is particularly significant for Sufis. Many of the best-known Sufis, such as the Persian mystic Rumi, expressed their devotion for the divine by writing love poetry. Opick's own admiration for Sufi literature was clear, which he demonstrated by reciting a Sufi poem that he personally found to be inspirational.<sup>18</sup>

As I engaged in the process of fieldwork, by working with musicians like Opick and attending events similar to the one described above, the themes of this dissertation began to unfold. While the focus of this study is the musical practices of Indonesian artists writing and performing Islamic popular music, my primary aim is to locate the resultant musical product within the artists' personal discourses of theology and social awareness. Based on my subjective experiences attending Islamic music concerts and events, several questions arose that have shaped the direction of my inquiry. In what ways do musicians negotiate between the two identities of Western popular and Islamic music within their musical product? How do they strive to musically (re)present specific Muslim ideologies and yet still appeal to Indonesians beyond religion? More importantly, how do artists' musical strategies allow them to participate in broader dialogues of social and religious meaning that normally are engaged in the civic realm?

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<sup>17</sup> A brief transcription of our discussion follows: Opick: Menurut saya sebenarnya semua lagu saya sufistik. Q: Semuanya? Opick: Semuanya. Q: Apa karakteristik yang membuat lagu Anda "Sufistik?" Opick: Cinta... kebanyakan cinta. [Opick: According to me, all of my songs are Sufist. Q: All of them? Opick: All of them. Q: What are the characteristics that make your songs Sufist?" Opick: Love... mostly love." ] Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTS

### 1.1.1 Islamic Revival amidst Indonesia's Diversity

That Islamic popular music performances have fostered socially conscious environments for the purposes of both entertainment *and* reform is not surprising. Not only have scholars successfully and frequently demonstrated the facility of popular music to represent political viewpoints,<sup>19</sup> Islam in Indonesia has moreover been at the forefront of the nation's politics since the 1980s. While Indonesia is not a Muslim country (that is, it does not uphold Islamic law, or *sharia*,<sup>20</sup> as the basis of the nation's judiciary branch), the roughly ninety percent of citizens that are Muslim have the increasing ability to direct Indonesian politics.

One of the primary challenges of the Indonesian government is to promote a sense of national identity, given the country's significant regional and religious diversity. The archipelago geographically consists of 3000 inhabitable islands, and ethnically comprises 726 distinct languages and cultural groups.<sup>21</sup> During the post-colonial government, the first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, cultivated a sense of national unity through his doctrine of *Pancasila*,<sup>22</sup> five

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Boulton, "The Popular Geopolitical Wor(l)ds of Post-9/11 Country Music," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 3 (2008): 373-87; Robert Van Sickle, "A World without Citizenship: On (the Absence of) Politics and Ideology in Country Music Lyrics, 1960-2000," *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 3 (2005): 313-31. Though both Boulton and Van Sickle are writing about country music, they discuss the "affective power" of music "to (re)present political attitudes." Boulton, "Popular Geopolitical Wor(l)ds," 375.

<sup>20</sup> Sharia, like many words in Indonesia, is borrowed from Arabic, and can be transliterated in a variety of ways; shari'a, shari'ah, shariah are each acceptable transliterations in the Indonesian language.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Sukarno developed the principles of *Pancasila* in 1945, naming them the *Dasar Negara*, or philosophical underpinnings of the new nation. They include: 1) Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa (belief in one God); 2) Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab (a just and civilized humanity); 3) Persatuan Indonesia (the unity of Indonesia); 4) Kerakyatan yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan dalam Permusyawaratan/Perwakilan (democracy led by the inner wisdom of the people's representatives); 5) Keadilan Sosial bagi Seluruh Rakyat Indonesia (social justice for the whole people of Indonesia).

philosophical principles that still serve as a guide for the nation-state.<sup>23</sup> The national emblem of the country, the eagle known as *Garuda Pancasila*, grips a scroll displaying the nation's motto: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Translated as "Unity in Diversity," the motto addresses Sukarno's notion of national identity by rhetorically leveling the differences between ethnic and religious groups, each of which is supposedly equally important from the vantage point of the nation.

In addition to ethnic diversity, religion plays an increasingly important role in issues of Indonesian national identity. In particular, the sheer number of Muslims—comprising almost ninety percent of the population—seems to pose a threat to the commitment to diversity of the new state, especially as select Islamic groups have both historically and contemporarily lobbied for the enactment of Islamic law. Indonesian law allows for a belief in one of five faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity,<sup>24</sup> Hinduism, and Buddhism, in accordance with the final clause of the doctrine Pancasila, *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*, or belief in monotheism. Through this article, the state restrained the active role of Islam in the state and also remained vague enough to accommodate adherence to indigenous ethnic beliefs, as long as they were practiced within the confines of one of the five accepted religions.

During the first thirty years of Indonesia's history, the political administrations of former President Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" and President Suharto's "New Order" marginalized Islam in favor of traditionalist Javanese religious practices, a strategy that deprived Indonesian Muslims of a political voice. Beginning in the mid-1980s however, in what has often been seen as an attempt to consolidate his power as the second president, Suharto began to cater to his

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<sup>23</sup> Jacques Bertrand discusses the five concepts of Pancasila in some detail, especially regarding the controversy surrounding the belief in one God, which many Muslims hoped to limit to a "more explicit reference to Islam in the Indonesian constitution." Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32-3.

<sup>24</sup> Protestant Christianity and Catholicism are considered to be two separate religious faiths. Indonesians are required to be a member of one of these faiths and that information is recorded on their national identification cards.

Muslim constituents, first by sanctioning the creation of a Muslim intellectual organization, the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI),<sup>25</sup> and then by fostering a relationship with more conservative Muslim groups. During this period, a variety of Islamic ideas emerged that were not formerly represented within the political structure of the New Order. Only in 1998, however, following the decline of the New Order, could these previously suppressed Muslim voices be developed freely in the public sphere.

The Indonesian musicians represented in this study engage in Islamic discourses that are partially based in the Islamic intellectual movement of the 1980s. In harmony with the ideals of ICMI, they support notions of political reform, government accountability, and improved democracy.<sup>26</sup> These artists belong to a new generation of political thinkers and activists, often dubbed the New Islamic Intellectuals, for their active theorizing about religious renewal, political/bureaucratic reform, and social transformation in contemporary Indonesia. The New Islamic Intellectuals are not members of any specific Muslim organization; rather, they are joined together by their mutual claim that the nation-state should not necessarily be integrated with Islam. Rather than a legalist or formalist conception of Islam, the New Islamic Intellectuals aim for a “substantialist” conception of Islam, one that is “less ideological, but more intellectually and practically relevant to the needs of Indonesian Muslims.”<sup>27</sup> According to anthropologist Bahtiar Effendy, this philosophy allows Muslims to become serious contenders in determining the political future of Indonesia.<sup>28</sup>

In the wake of the New Order regime, the historian Robert Hefner witnesses two trends in contemporary Indonesia which are important to this study: 1) a resurgence in religiosity,

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<sup>25</sup> *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia*.

<sup>26</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia, ca. 1300 to the present*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 401.

<sup>27</sup> Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-7.

particularly Islam; and 2) a period of democratic renewal. According to Hefner, the concurrence of these two trends creates a uniquely Indonesian type of democracy, one that is akin to, but not identical to, Western liberalism, as Muslims look to Islam for inspiration in creating the new political system.<sup>29</sup> Naming this ideological structure “civil democracy,” he defines it as:

...a noncoercive culture that encourages citizens to respect the rights of others as well as to cherish their own. This public culture depends on mediating institutions in which citizens develop habits of free speech, participation, and toleration. .... Muslim voluntary associations (as well as those of other religions) [play] a role in the public life of civil society as well as in personal ethics.<sup>30</sup>

Civil democracy is particularly relevant for Islam, as its success is dependant upon existing public institutions, which have rich historical precedents in Indonesian Islam in the form of religious learning centers and Islamic political parties. Additionally, civil democracy provides an alternative to Western-style democracy, yet still allows a multiplicity of voices to be heard in Indonesia’s diverse society.

The resurgence in Muslim religiosity that Hefner observed is partially evidenced by the rise in legislative bills in post-Suharto Indonesia, as Muslim citizens struggle to find a political voice. Many of those bills (introduced and often abandoned after intense debate) seem to cater to conservative Muslims. Aimed at social reform, these bills in their strictest versions would curtail traditional culture in its present form. Perhaps the most pivotal example in this trend of moral politicking is the so-called “anti-pornography bill,” the strictest versions of which would have outlawed many of Indonesia’s traditional dance forms.<sup>31</sup> Because of the regular recurrence

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<sup>29</sup> Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>31</sup> The “anti-pornography bill” was bandied about in parliament beginning in 1999 until a version finally passed in 2008, albeit in a rendering that seemed open to broad interpretation. Several newspaper articles written immediately after the passing of the bill express the mixed sentiment that arose. Abdul Khalik in particular outlines the three most contentious parts of the bill, explaining why these particular aspects were feared. This article is accessible online [<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/10/31/porn-bill-passed-despite-protests.html>] should the reader wish to follow some of the comments that it inspired. Abdul Khalik, “Porn Bill Passed Despite Protests,” *Jakarta*

of these legislative debates, many political observers have noted the orthodox, or “scripturalist,” nature of Indonesia’s Islamic revival. However, anthropologist Julia Day Howell alerts us to another equally significant ongoing revival of Sufi Islam.

Indonesia has long practiced a Sufi style of Islam, though the word Sufi as such did not enter common usage until the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> More than “Islamic mysticism,” Sufism is a “personal *intensification* of faith and practices...often employed by Muslims as spiritual enhancements of their everyday lives.”<sup>33</sup> Some scholars maintain that it was Sufi traders who first introduced Islam to Java,<sup>34</sup> though in general historical evidence from this time period is lacking. It is equally possible that orthodox Muslims first settled in Indonesia, but became “Javanized” as they assimilated with the Hindu, Buddhist and/or animistic believers that they encountered. Because pre-Islamic traditions in Indonesia are often mystical in origin, the spiritual Islam that emerged might have borne similarities with Sufi Islam.

Someone who is a Sufi Muslim usually belongs to one of several orders, sometimes called a brotherhood, and studies with a teacher who is spiritually linked or can demonstrate descent from the Prophet Muhammad. In Indonesia, the most significant of these sects include Shattariyya, Qadiriyya, and Naqshabandiyya,<sup>35</sup> each of which has its origins in the Middle East. However, there has been a recent increase in Sufi-style practices that are not necessarily associated with any of these sects, such as through ritualized chanting (*zikir*) “as a way to develop the spiritual or ‘inner’ (*batin*) meaning of religion.”<sup>36</sup> This intensification of Sufi

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*Post*, October 31, 2008; Peter Gelling, “Indonesia Passes Broad Anti-Pornography Bill,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001): 711. She writes that simply *tasawuf* or *tarekat* were the more common terms.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 702 (her italics).

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Johns, “Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History,” *Journal of Southeast Asia History* 2, no. 2 (1961): 10-23.

<sup>35</sup> Ricklefs, *History of Modern Indonesia*, 212.

<sup>36</sup> Howell, “Sufism,” 712.

practice has occurred throughout Indonesia and is partly (re)institutionalized by a revitalization of traditional education facilities. Because these traditions are not practiced within the confines of any particular sect, but are borrowed and at times divorced from their historical origins, I imagine that these practices share much in common with New Age movements, as a sort of spiritual reaction to the problems of increasing modernity. In this study when I refer to Sufism, I mean this type of Sufism that is divorced from these ancient lineages. I borrow the term “New Sufi” or “Neo-Sufi” from the scholar of Indonesian literature, Harry Aveling, and others who use these terms to differentiate between those who borrow Sufi practices from those who are practitioners of Sufism. These “New Sufis” or “Neo-Sufis” are not only “substantialist” Muslims, but also reform-minded Muslims, who now encourage traditional Sufi practices, once deemed anathema, as acceptable spiritual enhancers of what otherwise some feared was becoming only a prescriptive faith.<sup>37</sup> This increase in personal piety demonstrates that Indonesia’s contemporary Islamic renaissance can also be deemed a Sufi revival.

As contemporary Muslims partake in both spiritual and democratic renewal, the question that pervaded the end of the Suharto era was no longer “Could Islam be an effective force in Indonesian politics,” but instead became “Whose Islam would be ascendant in the nation’s politics?” While this question of “Whose Islam?” is still vigorously debated in the political realm, it is also represented symbolically in other ideological domains, especially through the aesthetic language of the art world.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

## 1.1.2 Islamic Popular Music in Indonesia

### 1.1.2.1 Sound in Islam

Music can be a subject of controversy when it is paired with certain understandings of the religion of Islam. For many years and in many traditions, there has been a prevailing belief that there is “no such a thing as music in Islam,” but this statement presumes that Islam is a monolithic tradition with only one cultural understanding regarding music. The diverse cultural faces of Islam have produced many genres with musical aspects, from the *azan* (call to prayer) to *shalawat* (sung prayers). Some scholars such as Lois Lamya al Faruqi, whose work along with that of her husband is invaluable concerning Islamic arts, argue that there exists a musical continuum, where *azan* is “less musical” than band music for instance.<sup>38</sup> However in Indonesia at least, I found these distinctions to be somewhat minimized. For example, a Muslim friend of mine, Merlis Prabuningrat of Yogyakarta, arranged the *azan* for piano, adding consonant and flowing harmony beneath the melodic line. He played this work for me alongside others in his repertoire, including several of J.S. Bach’s minuets. When I asked him why he had arranged it for piano, he said, “Why not? It is very beautiful, just like classical music.”<sup>39</sup> Merlis made no effort to position the *azan* in a separate category from art music. Many of the styles of music discussed in this dissertation are referred to by Indonesians and record companies alike as *musik* (music), and therefore that is how I too describe them. However because of this infamous controversy, I believe that any understanding of Islamic music in Indonesia must also first consider this challenge concerning the nature of music, for some background is necessary to grasp the extra-musical implications of Islamic musical performance.

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<sup>38</sup> Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, “Music, Musicians, and Muslim Law,” *Asian Music* 17, no. 1 (Autumn – Winter 1985): 3-36. This text includes a list of musics in this continuum.

<sup>39</sup> Merlis Prabuningrat, conversation with the author, July 2005.



One of the reasons why making music inspires debate is that the Islamic faith privileges sonic experience as a site for religious worship. As the Arabic Muslim theologian Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) stated:

He [God] places listening before knowledge and sight. The first thing we knew from God and which became connected to us from Him was His speech and our listening... [A]ll the messengers came with speech... There is nothing but speech and listening. There can be nothing else. Were it not for speech we would not know what the Desirer desires from us. Were it not for hearing (*sam*'), we would not reach the point of gaining what is said to us. Through Speech we move about, and as a result of Speech, we move about in listening.<sup>40</sup>

Gabriel and the prophets first revealed the word of God through speech, a sonic delivery only thereafter transcribed by Muhammad. Though Muhammad was granted the power of literacy in order that this message might be preserved, the primary means of spreading Islam was through oral preaching. Therefore, the emphasis on Islam is through speaking and chanting the Qur'an, rather than through private reading. Muslims venerate sound by reciting the Qur'an in chant, calling Muslims to prayer through chant, repeatedly chanting God's name, and chanting prayers.

Sonic importance to the religion is found in all manifestations of Islam, whether Arabic or non-Arabic. The message of Islam is always delivered verbally both "in its universal Qur'anic form and in the form of local traditions."<sup>41</sup> As the medieval philosopher Ibn Taymiyyah states, "Listening to the word of God is the foundation of [the Muslim] religion."<sup>42</sup> By emphasizing "listening," Muslims can learn to judge all forms of listening to be *halal* (permissible) or *haram* (forbidden), whether secular or spiritual. He and others of his contemporaries note that the word

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<sup>40</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 213.

<sup>41</sup> Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, "Sounding the Word: Music in the Life of Islam," in *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 263.

<sup>42</sup> Fadlou Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 95.

of God is “the standard by which all other listening is to be measured,” both in daily discourse between coworkers and family and in musical listening.<sup>43</sup>

Music in Islam is “powerful” because the musicians have the ability to articulate or suppress God’s message. In certain Muslim traditions and in certain Sufi sects, music is believed to be a powerful aide in assisting a person to enter a spiritual state. Conversely, “wrong listening” can potentially deter a person’s spiritual orientation. Haram music has the potential to distract the listener from worshipping God, while halal music can help bring a listener closer to God, for example, harnessing the power of music through religious chant.<sup>44</sup> Both the performer and the listener bear responsibility in creating a sonically spiritual environment. The musician should realize the inherent power of sound and protect the listener by generating sounds that bring the listener closer to God. Through sound, the performer bypasses the listener’s rational judgment and enters the listener’s inner spirit. Therefore, the musician must be careful not to inspire non-Muslim thoughts by “arousing unruly passions, stimulating sensual pleasures, or distracting one from thoughts of God.”<sup>45</sup> Conversely, the listener must be aware of sound’s power to corrupt or edify the mind, and carefully choose what he or she hears. Listeners must be particularly wary of music because of its beauty. The listener bears the responsibility of choice, for in order for any performer to have any effect, whether good or bad, the audience must be receptive.<sup>46</sup>

While the Qur’an keeps relatively silent on the topic of the permissibility of music (instead focusing on speech), theologians seek answers about the acceptability of music from their interpretations of the *hadith*, or the collection of sayings of the prophet Muhammad (570-

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Hirschkind, “Hearing Modernity: Egypt, Islam and the Pious Ear,” in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. by Veit Erlman (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 134.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 132-9.

632 CE), compiled only after his death. However, the hadith offer no consensus on the matter and are often contradictory, some encouraging the use of music and others condemning the practice.<sup>47</sup> While some stories suggest a positive attitude towards music, when taken into account with others, it becomes apparent that the Muslim theologian requires alternative sources to understand the place of music within Islam.

### 1.1.2.2 The Sounds of Islam in Indonesia

Islamic music genres are widely evidenced in Indonesia. Islamic musical performance in Indonesia partly avoids theological controversy because of the widely accepted theory of early Islam in Indonesia. Arriving on the sails of merchants, these early Muslims propagated their faith through assimilative practice. Scholars are quick to highlight the role of nine mythical saints, the *wali sanga*, who preached through arts forms that were already familiar to Indonesians. One of the nine, Sunan Kudus is credited with inventing the West Javanese puppet theater, *wayang golek*, that at least partly narrates its drama through song and gamelan performance, while another, Sunan Bonang, is thought to have played a similar role in the Central Javanese arts.

The many manifestations of Islamic music in Indonesia are as disparate as the nation's cultural diversity, and ethnomusicologist Anne Rasmussen (2005) provides a brief catalogue of

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<sup>47</sup> Amnon Shiloah, *Music in Islam*, 33, discusses some of these contradictory stories in the hadith, hypothesizing that perhaps Muhammad's quarrel was not with music in general but only certain aspects of it. For instance, maybe he simply didn't like the aesthetic quality of reed-pipes, or in a more serious grievance, was condemning the historic practice of selling and buying minstrel-girls. He justifies this explanation by juxtaposing like stories—in one tale, Muhammad condemns the reed-pipe, and in another he praises the joyful singing of minstrel-girls. It is easy for anyone to get tangled up in the seemingly contradictory nature of the hadith regarding music; for example, Muhammad once said "Music is fornication's magic," implying a negative reaction to the art (Earle H. Waugh, *Memory, Music, And Religion: Morocco's Mystical Chanters* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 124). However, another hadith places Muhammad at the scene of musical festival where he lifts his favorite wife Aisha above a crowd so that she can see some musicians "performing in a mosque" (Alan Boyd, "Music in Islam: Lamu, Kenya, a Case Study," in *Discourse in Ethnomusicology II: a Tribute to Alan P. Merriam*, ed. by Caroline Card (Bloomington: Ethnomusicology Publications Group, Indiana University, 1981), 84).

the most popular of these musical styles.<sup>48</sup> Some of these Islamic musical traditions in Indonesia are beginning to attract serious scholarly attention, breaking a longstanding trend in ethnomusicology to study traditional court music like gamelan, often examined through the veil of Hinduism rather than Islam. In her recent study of the lute and drum ensemble *gambus*, Birgit Berg demonstrates how Islamic music genres provide Indonesian youth with a medium to renegotiate their ethnicity as Arab Indonesians, as they foster musical connections with the Middle East rather than Asia.<sup>49</sup>

While all religious music performances contain elements of both the sacred and the secular,<sup>50</sup> musicians navigate between these two realms in the growing genre of Islamic popular music. The sales strategies of the secular music industry are based in part on their ability to organize their musical products into distinct, marketable categories. Because they must differentiate their music from secular pop, artists are quick to assert what makes their music “Islamic.” Usually this occurs in the religious intent of the singer, and the placement of the lyrics. There is nothing musically that distinguishes Islamic popular music as unique from its non-Islamic popular music. Nor does the music industry provide a clear definition that encompasses each of the new styles of Islamic music that has developed since the late 1990s and that artists can agree upon. Agus Idwar of the Indonesian music production company Forte Records refers to this style of music as simply *musik pop religius* (religious popular music).<sup>51</sup> Borrowing from his terminology and confining it to Islamic popular music, I define this genre as those music styles that began developing in Indonesia primarily in the 1990s, and whose musical

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<sup>48</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen, “The Arab Musical Aesthetic in Indonesian Islam,” *The World of Music* 47, no. 1 (2005): 65-89.

<sup>49</sup> Birgit Berg, “The Music of Arabs, The Sound of Islam: Hadrami Ethnic and Religious Presence in Indonesia,” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Jonathon Shannon, “Sultans of Spin: Syrian Sacred Music on the World Stage,” *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (2001): 1-12. He discusses the shifts in meaning between the sacred and secular in his study of Syrian Sufi music and meaning on the North American stage.

<sup>51</sup> Agus Idwar, discussion.

and performance styles primarily derivate from Western popular music styles. Only occasional borrowings occur from Arabic or indigenous Indonesian music and for this reason I exclude any styles that artists imagine to be mostly in an Indonesian or Arabic music tradition, such as gambus. However some of those styles, like *qasidah* (based on sung Arabic prayers), also have contemporary versions that share much in common popular music styles. For example, modern quasidah (*qasidah modern*) often contains Indonesian-language lyrics and a pop-music style, which I would argue places it in the category Islamic popular music. The shifting nature of many of these musical genres according to how they are defined and performed by each artist begins to illustrate how problematic creating these categories can be and how such decisions ultimately reside in the instincts of the musical taxonomist.

I identify three main styles of Islamic popular music, which are examined at greater length in this study: nasyid, Islamic rock, and Islamic fusion. Nasyid is an a cappella or lightly accompanied singing ensemble that combines lyrics based in understandings of Islam with mainstream popular music styles such as pop, rock, hip-hop, or jazz. Most commonly, it is performed in the style of doo-wop, with male vocalists singing in consonant harmony, led by one male vocalist. Despite the relatively recent appearance of nasyid, first occurring in the early 1990s, a variety of scholarship exists from the last decade, most notably the ethnomusicologist Margaret Sarkissian's study on Malaysian nasyid (2004).<sup>52</sup>

Islamic rock music similarly consists of the combination of lyrics inspired by Muslim ideology with Western pop or rock music, consisting of small electronically amplified instrumental ensembles with one lead vocalist (male or female). In contrast to nasyid, which is a self-contained style named thus by the musicians, Islamic rock is loosely defined by musicians

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<sup>52</sup> Margaret Sarkissian, "Religion Never Had It So Good: Contemporary Nasyid and the Growth of Islamic Popular Music in Malaysia," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 37 (2005): 124-52.

and often consists of secular recording artists who are strategically releasing an Islamic rock album for a religious holiday.

The third style, Islamic fusion, is even more loosely conceived, as artists tend not to define their music genre. Musicians in this category fuse a variety of Western styles, often in the same song, with ethnic music, not necessarily the artist's indigenous ethnicity, in a manner similar to what some might call world music. When these songs have Islamic nuances, such as in their lyrics or stylistic considerations, then I classify them in this narrower style category that I call Islamic fusion.

My exclusion of the Indonesian music genre *dangdut*—which fuses Western popular music with Hindi film styles—from this discussion of Islamic popular music is worth noting. While originally through its creator Rhoma Irama in the 1970s and 1980s *dangdut* had religious and politically themed lyrics, it has since metamorphosed into a secular dance genre, often associated with rags-to-riches tales of young female singers with sexualized overtones. Though the religious significances may still be present (especially through many of the earlier songs), these elements are frequently less visible and less recognized than the music's secular and nationalist connotations. Because *dangdut* is such an important genre in Indonesian popular music and has its origins in Islamic-themed material, excluding *dangdut* from this conversation about Islamic popular music might seem to some as if I am avoiding the “elephant in the room”—that is, the subject of *dangdut* is so enormous it is impossible to ignore, yet is not mentioned because it is inconvenient. While a more complete study on Islamic popular music might include this genre (and others such as *gambus* and *qasidah*), the parameters of this study must necessarily be delimited. Fortunately, there are a variety of ethnomusicological studies that begin work on this subject and it is to these works which I direct the reader, including but not

limited to: 1) William Frederick's groundbreaking article on dangdut's beginnings in Indonesia, focusing on Rhoma Irama; 2) Jeremy Wallach's valuable research on the class orientations of the genre; and 3) Andrew Weintraub's more recent study on the print media's construction of a dangdut audience.<sup>53</sup>

In the event described earlier, the music performances pointed to each of the three distinct styles that are the subject of this study. The two groups that performed first were in a nasyid style, while the singer Opick fits more closely to an Islamic rock style, though audiences have also claimed him as a nasyid artist. The third style, Islamic fusion, was present indirectly in the final song that Opick sang, "Heart Medicine." This song had been recently popularized by an Islamic fusion group, Kiai Kanjeng, whose recording of the song is in a modern pop style fused with Javanese gamelan instruments. Opick's performance of this hit song, which incidentally was also the song that launched his career shift from secular to religious music, evokes this third style of Islamic popular music.

The commercial success of Islamic popular music is related to the outstanding sales of a similar genre, contemporary Christian rock, which reached as high as \$500 million per annum in the United States alone.<sup>54</sup> Whatever the case for the recent rise in its production in Indonesia, Islamic popular music has a steady returning market around religious holidays, and it is not unheard of for an Islamic pop song to top the secular charts even in secular months. For example, the song "Andaiku Tahu" ("If I Knew") from the short album *Surgamu* (Your Heaven) by the rock group Ungu (Purple) shares the male singer's fear of death as he asks God for

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<sup>53</sup> William H. Frederick, "Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture," *Indonesia* 34 (October 1982): 103-30; Jeremy Wallach, "Exploring Class, Nation, and Xenocentrism in Indonesian Cassette Retail Outlets," *Indonesia* 74, no. 3 (2002): 79-102; Andrew N. Weintraub, "Dangdut Soul: Who are 'the People' in Indonesian Popular Music?," *Asian Journal of Communication* 16, no. 4 (2006): 411-31.

<sup>54</sup> Charlie Peacock-Ashworth, and Molly Nicholas, *At the Crossroads: Inside the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music* (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2004), xi.

forgiveness from his sins. This rock ballad, released strategically for the month of Ramadan in 2006,<sup>55</sup> won honors for best song on the prestigious SCTV<sup>56</sup> music awards as late as March 2007, several months distant from major Muslim holidays.

At least one Indonesian major label has created a smaller production division designed to address and meet the needs of Muslim audiences in response to the increased popularity of Islamic music styles. Forte Records, an Indonesian division of Sony BMG, has created a department named Nadahijrah<sup>57</sup> to focus on a smaller clientele of Islamic music artists, each of whom has achieved remarkable success in both the music industry and within the broader Indonesian popular spiritual realm.<sup>58</sup> Nadahijrah's success is partly linked to the artistic vision of its director, Agus Idwar,<sup>59</sup> whose own experience as an Islamic pop singer has helped focus his clients' talent into producing marketable music. Islamic pop musicians have similarly responded to the growing trend of Islamic music genres by creating musicians' unions in Jakarta and Bandung for the advancement of religious music in the secular music industry, as they seek major labels for their product.

From the perspective of musical collaboration, the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic popular music is hardly surprising, given the thriving presence of Western and Western-styled popular music in Indonesia. North American and European bands enjoy widespread recognition in Indonesia, and Indonesian artists that write in the style of Western popular music enjoy a certain amount of prestige. Initially, consuming Western-styled popular music symbolically located the listener within an elite social and economic stratum. However, recently there has

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<sup>55</sup> Ramadan is a holy month in Islam and represents a religious period of fasting and reflection for Muslims.

<sup>56</sup> SCTV stands for Surya Citra Televisi, an Indonesian television station based in Jakarta that has been broadcasting since 1990. It frequently provides nightly broadcasts of Indonesian performing artists and has been hosting the SCTV Music awards annually since 2003.

<sup>57</sup> *Nada* means "musical note;" *Hijrah* refers to the Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina, ca. 622 A.D.

<sup>58</sup> Some of the artists signed by Nadahijrah include Rafly, Debu, Opick, and Ust. Jefri al Buchori.

<sup>59</sup> Formerly of the nasyid group Snada.



been a homogenizing demand for these musics that crosscuts class boundaries.<sup>60</sup> By wedding Islamic lyrics with a Western popular music style, Islamic popular music artists are writing in a musical language that is not foreign but “natural” for Indonesians, especially the youth, many of whom have grown up listening to secular rock music.<sup>61</sup>

Western-styled popular music, though it is generally thought of in terms of entertainment, has an innate political dimension as a globalized cultural product in Indonesia. While it may never be possible to fully assess political impact of music upon audiences,<sup>62</sup> the Indonesian government recognized this political element as early as the 1960s, as rock music was suspected of harboring neocolonial, imperialist agendas. The New Order government partially lifted this stigma under Suharto, who, at least publicly, endorsed Western-styled popular artists, despite intensifying strict censorship provisions.<sup>63</sup> The politicized consequences of singing Western music in a non-Western location become even more complex when that music style is joined with Islam. More than just one of Indonesia’s five religions, Islam is often held in ideological opposition to Western capitalism, to which secular pop music is bound historically through music marketing strategies.

An artist’s decisions to sing or perform music in a Western musical style, while certainly contingent upon personal preference and musical taste, can be a result of political motives. It is not uncommon for Indonesian musicians to view a career as an entertainer to be a stepping-stone for a political vocation. In one conversation that I had with a rising musician in 2005, before his

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<sup>60</sup> Wallach, “Exploring Class, Nation, and Xenocentrism.”

<sup>61</sup> While similar studies have yet to be written about Islamic music in Indonesia, Paul Baker has argued that in America, contemporary Christian music bridges the gap between the youth and the traditional church. Because the youth grew up with rock music, rock is a “natural language” for the youth, and as such, has special powers of communication with them. Baker, *Contemporary Christian Music: Where it Came From, What It Is, Where It’s Going* (Westchester, IL, Crossway Books, 1985), xvii, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Boulton, “Popular Geopolitical Wor(l)ds,” 376.

<sup>63</sup> Emma Baulch, “Gesturing Elsewhere: the Identity Politics of the Balinese Death/Thrash Metal Scene,” *Popular Music* 22, no. 2 (2003): 206; 212.

first album was released, the singer joked that if his album did not succeed, he would most likely pursue a career as a shepherd. Surprised by the contrast, I asked, “In that case, why would you want to be an artist?” Without hesitation, he answered, “Because Indonesian people listen to pop artists.” He continued, saying that if he could become famous as an artist first, it might be easier to be elected to public office later in his life. Because his band’s successive albums have topped the Indonesian charts annually since this comment, his career as a shepherd seems doubtful. By participating in popular music and becoming a “star,” the voice of an artist is amplified and has powerful potential to reach large audiences, bearing his or her non-musical agendas. As musical “stars” with powerful voices are historically present even in traditional Indonesian music genres,<sup>64</sup> there is a choice made by artists to express their individual voice within a transnational music genre.

Though the artists discussed in this study work within popular music genres, it is not merely their musical medium that enables them to reach mass audiences and become stars. In her discussion of Qur’anic recitation in Indonesia, Arabic music scholar Anne Rasmussen writes: “Like musicians, reciters *enjoy celebrity status*, and through their teaching and judging promote high standards of musicianship, virtuosity, and technical ability among practitioners.”<sup>65</sup> Reciting the Qur’an is not considered to be a form of music, but it does have many recognizable musical qualities. Rasmussen says that “good recitation informs traditional music, even in non-religious contexts, in a number of ways,” such as through the use of nasality in the vocal timbre, rhythmic freedom, long melismas, and through the devotional and spiritual intent of the singer.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Andrew N. Weintraub, *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java* (Athens: Ohio University Research in International Studies, 2004). He identifies the dalang (puppeteer) as a “superstar” who has the ability to comment on political affairs in the Sundanese puppet genre *wayang golek*.

<sup>65</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen, “The Qur’an in Daily Life: The Public Project of Musical Oratory,” *Ethnomusicology* 45, no. 1 (2001), 42 (emphasis added).

<sup>66</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen, “Islamic Music,” in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 422.

While stardom *can* place artists in a leadership position regarding politics and religion, a cynic might argue it is more likely that the artist is truly seeking personal fortune and fame. Indeed many Indonesians with whom I spoke were wary of the motivations of these artists, believing that popular religious musicians were primarily interested in such gain. One professor at the Bandung Arts Institute (*Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia*, also known as STSI, Bandung) confessed his belief that the genre of religious popular music only attracted artists who had difficulty succeeding in the secular recording industry. This professor felt that the religious pop music genre served to propel mediocre performing artists into stardom more quickly than the more artistically discerning secular market. This brand of cynicism is not unique to Indonesian Islamic popular music and is also documented in other genres, such as Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) in the United States.<sup>67</sup> Conversely, artists who *have* succeeded in the secular music industry and then released religious-themed albums are equally in danger of criticism. For example, one Yogyakarta journalist who was a long-time fan of the band Dewa 19 (discussed in chapter 3 and whose sixth and seventh albums began to play on Islamic themes) told me that even though he felt that the band's music resonated (*cocok*) with Islamic themes, he himself did not consider the band to be Islamic. Instead, he saw the artists as being interested in making "good music" for a "good price." Partly, he admitted, his bias that the artists were secularly oriented stemmed from witnessing their worldly lifestyle celebrated daily through Indonesia's thriving gossip-TV journalism.

Conversely, while crossover artists are often seen through the lens of cynicism by secular fans, they are also celebrated by fans of the popular sacred-music industries. Just as Amy Grant

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<sup>67</sup> While there is a surprising lacuna of printed scholarly material on CCM, a growing interest in this area was witnessed at the Society of Ethnomusicology conference in 2009, which saw the development of a special interest group dedicated to religious music. In the meantime, I refer readers to Peacock-Ashworth and Nicholas, *At the Crossroads*, 2004.

was graciously received by CCM fans, so too did Islamic fans welcome the British pop singer Yusuf Islam, formerly Cat Stevens, when he converted to Islam in 1977. His songs, from both before and after his conversion to Islam, are commonly heard on Muslim music radio stations in Indonesia, such as the Bandung radio station MQFM that will be discussed further in chapter 2. This is especially true of his version of “Morning has Broken,” a popular Christian hymn written by the English poet Eleanor Farjeon in 1931, and “Wild World,” both of which he recorded in the early 1970s prior to his conversion to Islam in 1977. As far as I could tell, there was no dialogue about the interfaith potential of these accepted “crossover” tunes, nor did either inspire any discourse about the authenticity of these songs as being Muslim. Instead they were simply accepted and loved.

Similarly, there is little evidence that artists and fans alike are concerned with the overt commercialization of their religion by charging for Islam through sales of music records and concert tickets as in the case of American CCM. I am reminded of the story of the Christian singer Keith Green, who was influential in redefining the CCM evangelical mission. After a born-again experience when he was nineteen years old, he refused to charge for concerts or for his albums, asking his Christian fans only for a donation of whatever they could contribute. Green’s untimely death in a 1982 plane crash with two of his children effectively terminated his vision of making CCM freely available to the general public; however his legacy of music ministry remained a role model for rising CCM artists.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, I encountered no such “equivalent” in Indonesia’s Islamic popular music industry. Perhaps this is one dialogue that has its roots in theology; there is no story of the Islamic prophet Mohammad overturning the tables of salespeople in front of the temple or mosque as there is of the prophet Jesus in the Christian

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<sup>68</sup> Barry Alfonso, *The Billboard Guide to Contemporary Christian Music* (New York: Billboard Books, 2002), 173-5.

gospels. Because this story is the only place in the Bible where Jesus gets angry, many Christians accord greater religious significance to what is often called “selling religion.” On the contrary, in Indonesia it is common for mosques to have small items for sale in the hallways and entryways. I visited many of these mosque markets, and even found one of my earliest treasures of ethnography in front of the student campus mosque at the University of Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta—a compact disc entitled *Romantic Nasyid* that helped set me on the path of this research.

In any case, while a study could be presented on the financial aspect of the religious music industry, such a goal is not the aim of this dissertation, and it becomes necessary to alert the reader to what this study is *not* before proceeding. This is not a study of the business aspects regarding music production and sales of Islamic popular music, nor is it overly concerned with audience discourse. Certain aspects dealing with these themes are scattered throughout the following pages, but only insofar as they are part of a dialogue with the artist’s works. Instead, my primary concern in this dissertation is to present the intentions and voices of the artists as they expressed them to me during the course of my research. While I realize that their ideological and musical positions open many opportunities for dissent and counter-dialogue, I have made a conscious decision to leave those voices for the subject of another much-needed study.

## **1.2 THESIS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

Earlier the question was posed, “How do [musicians] strive to musically (re)present specific Muslim ideologies and yet still appeal to Indonesians beyond religion?” In my investigation of

Islamic popular music, I find that one of the elements underlying each of the three main styles in the genre is the articulation of Sufi Islam as currently practiced in Indonesia. Islamic popular musicians commonly isolate, modify and interpret Sufi principles within their particular musical practice, though their treatment differs according to the artist's own religious ideology and objectives. As Sufi Islam crosscuts musical style and religious perspective, it serves to 1) foster a sense of political unity between Muslims of differing ideological strata and 2) unite Muslims and non-Muslims through introspection and commonalities in religious belief. This manipulation of the "universal" themes to Sufism that occur across national boundaries allows artists to participate in broader dialogues of social and religious transformation than normally would be found in artistic religious expression. While music and lyrics are one way that these extra-musical meanings are revealed, artists often divulge the deeper meaning of their music in their written and spoken rhetoric, either in speeches during their performances or in essays about their music. Thus, the musical analyses in this dissertation will be situated within the surrounding discourses of the artists.

Until recently, most musical scholarship concerning Islam in Indonesia has focused only on the Islamicization of music genres indigenous to Indonesia. This study addresses this lacuna by examining overtly Islamic music genres in Indonesia influenced by Western styles and primarily disseminated through access to the mass media. By focusing on popular music genres, this project aims to uncover the ways that musicians attempt to make certain Islamic ideologies popular in Indonesia. At the same time, I explore how artistic forms intersect with broader themes of social reform in Indonesia, at a time in the nation's history when the expressions of these issues have the ability to affect the current direction of the nation. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge concerning religion and political activism in post-

New Order Indonesia. By examining the ways in which contemporary Muslim musical practices advocate social awareness, this study demonstrates that music is not merely an aesthetic art form, but a powerful tool that can be used to mediate new ideas about the relationship between politics and religion. Beyond substantiating the increasingly Sufi nature of Indonesia's Islamic revival in the post-Suharto nation, this study also highlights the importance of examining music through discourse, in order to scrutinize the multiple layers of meaning obtained by careful listeners, outside of the commercial packaging of the musical product.

### **1.3 METHODOLOGY AND THE FIELD SITE**

Thomas Turino, a musicologist and anthropologist who specializes in semiotics, writes that it is “only through ethnographic research that one gains access to the interpretants of a particular musical community's meaningful encounters with musical signs,”<sup>69</sup> to which Jeremy Wallach, ethnomusicologist of Indonesian popular music, adds that what a certain music “signifies, cannot be answered without reference to a particular historical moment and from the inside of a specific interpretive community.”<sup>70</sup> Musical sound is anchored to lived experience, and its power to (re)present ideology is located within historical and geographic currents, as it derives its power from non-musical relationships. With this in mind, the ideas developed in this study derive from ethnographic study conducted in Indonesia over a period of thirteen months, between 2005 and 2007.

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Turino, “Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircean Semiotic Theory for Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2 (1999): 221-55.

<sup>70</sup> Wallach, “Exploring Class, Nation, and Xenocentrism,” 110.

Beginning in the summer of 2005, with financial assistance provided by the Henry Luce Foundation, I performed a preliminary overview of the project in order to determine the physical location and direction of the study. The interviews that I conducted during this time included two main groups: 1) performing musicians of Islamic music genres, and 2) public- and private-school educators, particularly directors and religious leaders of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), supported by the two largest civic Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama.<sup>71</sup> In addition, I attended Islamic music concerts in a variety of genres in Central, East and West Java, as well as on the nearby island of Lombok. It was from these conversations and performances that I determined the three main styles of music—Islamic rock, fusion, and nasyid—that are the subject of this study and that served to differentiate performers of popular Islamic music styles.

The majority of the ethnographic research was conducted with the aid of a United States Student Fulbright award for ten months of study in Indonesia, beginning in November 2006. During this time, I divided the field site into three geographic areas, which seemed to be the focal points of the three Islamic popular music styles: Bandung, Jakarta, and Yogyakarta (see figure 4). Bandung is the capital of West Java and acts as a kind of ideological homeland to nasyid performers. While nasyid is popular throughout Indonesia and especially Java, in the year 2005 over two hundred nasyid groups existed in Bandung alone. Further, it was the site of the first radio station dedicated to nasyid, as well as the first nasyid musician's union.<sup>72</sup> Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, meanwhile, is the center of Islamic rock music. Most popular music that is distributed nationally is recorded and produced in the nation's capital. While certain artists do live in neighboring cities (for example, the pioneer of the music style, the family band Bimbo,

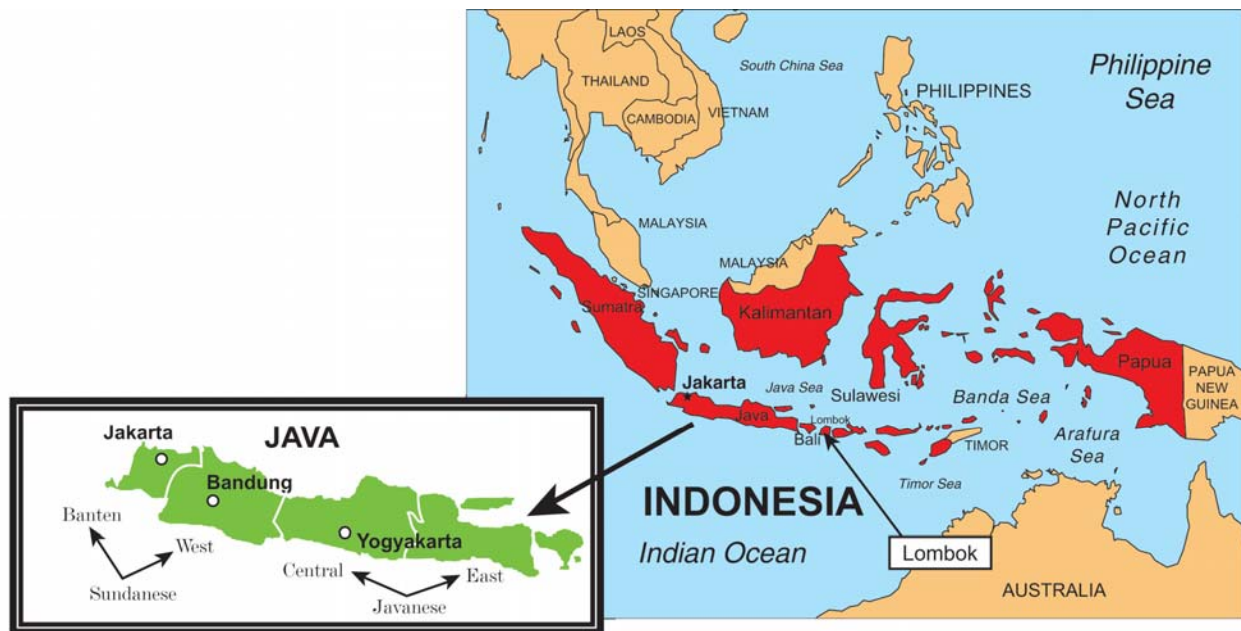
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<sup>71</sup> Nahdatul Ulama is sometimes spelled Nahdlatul Ulama and often referred to by its abbreviated form, NU. It stands for "Renaissance of Muslim Clergy."

<sup>72</sup> Adjie Esa Poetra, in discussion with the author, April 2007.



lives in Bandung) musicians travel to Jakarta for performances and recording opportunities with major labels. Yogyakarta is the center of Central Javanese cultural tourism. Islamic fusion music exists throughout Indonesia, wherever ethnic and popular Western music styles combine. Yogyakarta, however, is home to the group that popularized this style of music nationwide. Kiai Kanjeng began recording on a national label in Jakarta, before switching to self-production in 2006 in Yogyakarta.



**Figure 4. Map of Indonesia, indicating areas where fieldwork was conducted**

Despite this geographic partition, the three styles studied in this dissertation are not limited in performance to one area of Indonesia, and artists often toured between the three cities I demarcated as research centers. By moving between these three regions myself, I witnessed performances of all three styles in each of them. Thereby, a picture was painted in broad strokes of how these three styles allowed performers to interact with their followers in a variety of environments, with different audiences. Yet it was through interviews with musicians, audience

members, and music patrons at each of these locations that a more detailed picture began to emerge.

In each region, certain locations proved especially valuable to my fieldwork. In Bandung, I conducted most of my research in the area surrounding the pesantren Daarut Tauhiid,<sup>73</sup> especially as it regarded the business conglomerate Manajemen Qolbu (MQ) or “Heart Management.” As will be discussed in the second chapter, Daarut Tauhiid served as a focal point for nasyid artists, because of the promotion and support provided by the pesantren leader, KH Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym). I concentrated my efforts in the departments at the pesantren where I felt that the convergence between music, media, and ideology were greatest. They included: 1) MQ TV, a locally broadcast religious television station, the first of its kind in Indonesia; 2) MQ FM, the religious radio station, centrally located in Bandung with branches in five Indonesian cities; and 3) MQ Productions, the production house and recording studio of all MQ media, including nasyid. Daarut Tauhiid proved to be a vibrant location for nasyid artists, even for those musicians who drew their inspiration from other Islamic leaders, because as often as not at least one of the musicians from each nasyid group was employed by the MQ conglomerate. In addition to interviews with Aa Gym and his employees, I conducted interviews with members of local nasyid groups that were not formally affiliated with MQ but had other connections that kept them close to the Daarut Tauhiid campus, such as the groups Denteng Hati and Mupla, both of which had members employed by Daarut Tauhiid.

In Yogyakarta, I worked almost exclusively with the music ensemble Kiai Kanjeng. I followed the group to performance venues in Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Jombang, Jakarta, and various villages surrounding Yogyakarta. Attending a combination of practice sessions, performances, as well as traveling with Kiai Kanjeng members to concert sites afforded me with

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<sup>73</sup> Alternatively spelled Darut Tauhid and Daarut Tauhid. The pesantren is commonly referred to as DT.

a mixture of formal interviews, and well as unrecorded conversations during the course of travel and in pre/post performance discussions. Additionally I interviewed followers of the group who were not explicitly involved in performances, including family members, researchers, student activists, and event organizers.

In Jakarta, I interviewed a variety of Islamic rock musicians who had either released religious albums or performed with nasyid/Islamic fusion artists, such as the bands Ungu and Gigi. I eventually focused on the secular Indonesian rock band Dewa 19, who had released three albums with Sufi Islamic significance that generated a strong response from the media and from radical Islamic groups. In addition to formal interviews with Dewa 19's audiences and musicians, I attended several concerts and visited their recording studio where I was able to meet with staff and managers.

I supplemented this data, gathered through ethnographic observation, by collecting physical material for later analysis. This allowed a historical narrative to emerge from print sources. These materials included: 1) philosophical and poetic works written by musicians; 2) books about musicians in the form of genre studies or biographies; 3) journalistic articles in newspapers and magazines; and 4) the professionally produced music products of the musicians themselves, including liner notes situating that product.

Additionally, two works have particularly influenced this dissertation in the ways that I conceive of Indonesian artists as Muslim leaders. Firstly, the work by Benedict Anderson, a political historian of Indonesia, has deeply influenced my understanding of power and leadership in Java. Secondly, the scholar of political Islam, John Esposito, provides a convincing model for comparison and contrast of these leaders, especially his ideas about how these leaders envision change (discussed further in the final chapter).

## 1.4 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Music, and the ideologies that it comes to represent, are the creative invention of musicians. In an effort to situate the discussion of “Whose Islam?” within actual discourses, I ground my considerations in a comparison of three very different popular musicians and leaders, whose musical creativity has produced innovative and significant contributions to the Islamic contemporary musical scene. Each chapter examines these artists as participants within the three styles of Islamic popular music; they were chosen not only because they aptly represent that particular style, but because of their leadership position toward other artists writing similar compositions. Each chapter considers the avowed relationship of the musician regarding Sufi ideology, and speculates on what meaning this has for the artists’ musical practice and beyond, into their ideologies of social transformation. These artists and leaders are: 1) KH Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym),<sup>74</sup> a televangelist who is owner of the Islam-based corporation Management Qolbu (MQ), leader of the non-traditional, modernist pesantren Daarut Tauhiid, and promoter of the nasyid genre of Islamic contemporary music; 2) Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun),<sup>75</sup> a political activist, literatus, and leader of Kiai Kanjeng, an ensemble that blends Western, Arabic, Chinese, and Indonesian traditional musics; and 3) Ahmad Dhani, a leading Indonesian popular-music artist, famous for his politically charged lyrics, sophisticated manipulation of the press, and Islamic undertones of his more recent albums. All of the above individuals have power in Indonesia because of their charisma as popular figures, yet it is

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<sup>74</sup> The KH before his name stands for Kiai Haji. *Kiai* is a title for an Indonesian Muslim leader; *Haji* is the title given to a man who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajjah* for women), one of the five obligatory duties required of Muslims. Aa is pronounced as two syllables, “ah-ah,” and Gym is pronounced with a hard g.

<sup>75</sup> In Bahasa Indonesia, the letter *c* is pronounced “ch.” Therefore, Cak is pronounced “chak” and rhymes with the English word “block.”

through their art that they incorporate sophisticated political arguments and place them within the grasp of the layperson.

The political historian Benedict Anderson argues that in Indonesia there is a direct correlation between power and geographic location. Power is geographically centralized, with those closest to the center having access to this power and the periphery locations considered to be weaker. Given this, it is unsurprising that the three leaders in question are all located in Java, with strong performance ties in the capital region of Jakarta.

Chapter 2 concerns KH Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) and the musical style nasyid. The focus of this chapter is his piece “Jagalah Hati,” a self-professed musical and poetic model for the workings of his corporation, Managemen Qolbu (Heart Management). Through a discussion of the exhaustive philosophy invested in this piece, as well as the correlative rules and traditions inherent in its parent genre nasyid, Managemen Qolbu can be seen more than just a business, but a model for the order that accompanies an Islamic lifestyle, an order that Indonesia needs if it is to succeed as a developing nation and claim its place in the global schema. Through Aa Gym’s writings, I see “Jagalah Hati” as a contemporary exegesis of the mystic scholar al-Ghazali, even though overt references to Sufism are minimized.

Chapter 3 focuses on the rock star Ahmad Dhani and the musical style Islamic rock. This chapter reveals how Dhani uses his music to comment on the current trends of Islamic practice in Indonesia and challenges his listeners to question what the basic tenets of Islam are really about, inviting them to question their own understandings of the religion through direct references to Sufism. In doing so, he has been accused of being an infidel, suffered numerous death threats, and been rewarded for his commitment to religious freedom. Professing to fight the rise of radical Islam, Dhani attempts to persuade his audiences that the superficial aspects of Islam are

less important than the religion's deepest meaning: love. Through an analysis of the religious themes in Dewa 19's music, with a particular focus on his song "Laskar Cinta," I address the success of his communications with his audiences, and question the value of rock music as a medium for promoting visions of Indonesian Islam.

The fourth chapter considers the Javanese cultural figure Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun) and the musical style of Islamic fusion. The focus of this chapter is the reconstruction of historical musical works with the ensemble Kiai Kanjeng, who resurrect traditional songs, believing that the fifteenth-century Sufi saints who are credited with writing many of these pieces embedded hidden political messages in the lyrics and music that are still relevant for contemporary situations. Cak Nun believes that recreating these songs and investing them with their "original" meanings will have the power to teach audiences effective ways of creating a modern Islamic society and teaching leaders how to wield authority appropriately. This chapter attempts to link traditional understandings of time and change within modern dialogues of reform, and shed light on a contemporary music phenomenon having all the trappings of a westernizing modernity within the borders of tradition and ethnicity. Musical analysis focuses on the songs "Gundul Pacul" and "Ilor-Ilor," in which Sufi principles are cleverly negotiated, but never referred to; the manner in which these songs are interpreted returns potent power to Sufi ideology as an effective means for social transformation.

The conclusion compares and contrasts the role of Sufism within the three previous chapters. Whether or not Sufi principles are modified, isolated as symbols, or actively sought, there is a general consensus that the importance of Sufism lies in its emphasis of inner expression. Despite the three alternate viewpoints and musical styles presented, each of the Sufi elements selected indicates that the process of Indonesian reform starts from a personal spiritual

transformation. Inter- and intra-religious dialogue only occurs following a meditation on one's own authentic expression of spirituality. Islam, through the expression of selected Sufi elements, is seen as universal and inclusive, and therefore foundational in creating social and political equality.

## 2.0 NASYID MUSIC AND AA GYM

In September 2002, the popular Muslim preacher from West Java, KH Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) demonstrated his commitment to religious tolerance by participating in a reconciliation ceremony that took place in a Christian Church in Poso, Central Sulawesi. The Poso church was located at a site of inter-religious conflict that occurred between 1998 and 2002 between Christians and Muslims and escalated through the incitement of radical religious groups, principally the paramilitary organization Laskar Jihad. Saying that he wanted to help ease the suffering of the people of Poso in any small way that he could, Aa Gym stated:

Kita berbeda agama, tapi kita sama-sama manusia yang memiliki hati... Adalah benar tak mudah untuk mengobati luka yang menganga di hati, tetapi kita tak akan bisa menikmati hidup bersama tanpa membuka lembaran baru. Semoga kita dikuatkan untuk bisa hidup berdampingan tanpa saling menyakiti.  
[We may practice different religions, but we are all humans, each with a heart... Surely, it will not be easy to heal the wounds that have pierced those hearts, but we will never be able to enjoy our lives without turning over a new leaf. May God strengthen us to be able to live once more side by side without hurting one another.]<sup>76</sup>

He followed his sermon by singing a song that he wrote, an admonition to guard the heart, called “Jagalah Hati.” The lyrics instructed those listening to purify themselves in order to live correctly in the world:

Bila hati kian lapang	When the heart grows wider
Hidup sempit terasa senang.	Then a narrow life feels content.
Walau kesulitan datang,	Though difficulties come,
Dihadapi dengan tenang.	They are faced with peacefulness.

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<sup>76</sup> Abdullah Gymnastiar, *Aa Gym: Apa Adanya* (Bandung: Khas MQ, 2006), 62-3.



In the context of the civil strife of Central Sulawesi, Aa Gym chose this song to encourage the people of Poso to look inwards and examine themselves as the first step toward conflict resolution. By emphasizing universals between believers, who are “all humans, each possessing a heart,” the song lyrics encourage both the Christians and Muslims present to perform introspective healing for the purpose of restoring peaceful relations with their religious neighbors.

At this time, Aa Gym was the leader and founder of a popular Islamic movement in Indonesia, centered in his business conglomerate Manajemen Qolbu (Heart Management), or MQ. Ideologically, MQ successfully navigated between what Islamic scholar Jacques Waardenburg defines as the popular and normative forms of Islam. Aa Gym’s style of preaching is “popular” in that his teachings exert a “strong emotional appeal” among the masses, manifest in a time of crisis and need, are responsive to external events occurring in society and help to create unique solutions that are separate from the “official” answers provided by government leaders or religious teachers (*ulama*).<sup>77</sup> Aa Gym strikes a balance with “normative” or “scripturalist” Islam by seeking a return to Islam’s mandates, basing his religious formulations in the Qur’an, and implementing his methods through established systems of education (his *pesantren*) and discourses of social unity.

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<sup>77</sup> Jacques Waardenburg, “Official and Popular Religion in Islam,” *Social Compass* 25, no. 3-4 (1978): 326-7.



**Figure 5. Aa Gym<sup>78</sup>**

As Aa Gym strikes a balance between normative and popular Islam in his own preaching, certain religious discourses are conspicuously absent from his official rhetoric about his paradigm, despite their clear presence in his devotional practices. Especially significant is his failure to discuss his borrowing from Sufi ideologies and practices, which are often explicitly quoted in his written works but are trivialized in his orations. Julia Day Howell notes how Aa Gym regularly modifies traditional Sufi forms, mentioning in particular the *wirid* or ritual chant, which he urges to be accompanied by communal, ritual weeping in an extreme heightened emotional state.<sup>79</sup> Despite Aa Gym's emphasis on the normative aspects of his theology, it is the

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<sup>78</sup> Photo taken by James Hoesterey.

<sup>79</sup> Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001): 719.

interplay with the “popular traditions of social values, ideas, and customs”<sup>80</sup> that buffers his conservative theology and allows for his success as a popular preacher. This chapter demonstrates how this interplay occurs through an analysis of Aa Gym’s leadership role in the musical style *nasyid*, a genre that draws equally from religious march songs (*haroki*) and inspiration from Western rhythm-and-blues music. By examining his position in the genre, especially regarding the impact of his song “Jagalah Hati,” this navigation between the normative and popular strata is revealed, despite Aa Gym’s obfuscation in his discourse.

Aa Gym’s song “Jagalah Hati” advocates a principle of Sufi Islam in which the mystic’s goal “is to cleanse the heart, to educate, or transform the self, and to find God.”<sup>81</sup> A common belief in Sufism is that the transformation of the self, or the “cleansing of the heart,” occurs in multiple stages. At the lowest level, the self is akin to Freud’s id and includes mankind’s basest impulses. At the highest level, the individual loses all sense of self and achieves perfect unity with the Divine.<sup>82</sup> Drawing on this basic tenet of Sufism, the song preaches that through the cleansing of the heart a person will be able to envisage both trials and fortunes with equal joy, as he or she grows in the knowledge that everything in life comes from God.

Shortly after the reconciliation ceremony in Poso, “Jagalah Hati” became a hit song throughout Indonesia, based on a popular cover version of the song in the *nasyid* style by an all-male pop-religious group named Snada. This chapter provides a theological and musical analysis of “Jagalah Hati” as well as a discussion of the artists’ discourse surrounding the song in order to reveal the song’s foundation in Sufi principles. By linking the rhetoric of Aa Gym with the theologian al-Ghazali, this chapter demonstrates that the relationship with mystical Islam is carefully cultivated, whether or not the composer makes any direct claim of Sufi inspiration.

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<sup>80</sup> Waardenburg, “Official and Popular Religion,” 330.

<sup>81</sup> James Fadiman, and Robert Frager, *Essential Sufism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 19.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Furthermore, the position of Aa Gym as a leading figure within the nasyid community of musicians implies the acceptance of these Sufi principles as a legitimate form of Islam, at least by consumers and performers of nasyid. By unveiling the hidden presence of Sufism in a genre based in urban centers this chapter illustrates Julia Day Howell's assertion that Sufism is equally as powerful a force in urban areas as it is Indonesia's rural regions. Especially as nasyid is commonly associated with Modernist Islam, a mode of Islam historically hostile to mystical Islam, the existence of Sufism even in this genre demonstrates that this belief system is more prevalent in contemporary Indonesian Islam than is often recognized.

## **2.1 NASYID DEFINED**

This study of Aa Gym's rhetoric as expressed through his music requires a brief description of the style in which he is writing. Nasyid is a sub-genre of Islamic popular music that combines religiously inspired lyrics with elements of mainstream popular-music styles, such as pop, rock, hip-hop, and jazz. In its most common form, upwards of three vocalists sing together, harmonizing in consonance, behind a lead singer who vocalizes the main melody and lyrics.

In Indonesia, nasyid originated in the student mosque centers of university campuses in the early 1990s and became popular in Indonesia in the late 1990s. Because of its development in urban campuses, the ideas and thoughts that surrounded those early *munsyid* (nasyid performers), such as a shared commitment to Palestine and democratic reform based upon Islamic principles, are still important to an understanding of the genre. Because of this, the

nasyid scholar Bart Barendregt notes that a political sensibility pervades much of the music.<sup>83</sup>

Stylistically, nasyid has developed from two main sources: 1) the march choruses (*haroki*) popular in student rallies designed to help listeners cultivate a spirit of *jihad* (struggle); and 2) the Indonesian music genre *qasidah modern*, which blends Arabic poetry and prayer with contemporary music, the traditional version of which is still commonly practiced in pesantren throughout Indonesia.<sup>84</sup>

Nasyid gained ground as a movement in Indonesia following the immense popularity of the Malaysian nasyid group Raihan in 1998, during which time it moved from the campuses into the mainstream media. Although the popularity of Malaysian groups played an important role in its promotion locally, it is important to note that nasyid in Indonesia developed independently of Malaysian nasyid. The newly popularized style consists texturally of a leader-accompaniment structure, with a lead singer performing the melody, and the remaining singers interjecting homophonic harmony, similar to 1960s doo-wop bands. As in Malaysia, Indonesian nasyid consists of single-gender singing ensembles, predominantly male. Whether or not female singers are theologically permissible is a matter of some controversy. The predominant view, demonstrated by the relatively few female nasyid performing groups in Indonesia, is that women must protect themselves from a male gaze by performing only in front of other women. When I asked Aa Gym his opinion, he worried that a man might be attracted to the physical beauty of the woman rather than her voice.

Memang bagusnya perempuan untuk perempuan lagi karena kalau tampil di depan umum. Apalagi misalnya rupanya begitu menarik, mungkin orang tidak dengar nasyidnya, lihat rupanya saja. Sedangkan, Islam menganjurkan untuk menjaga pandangan.

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<sup>83</sup> Bart Barendregt, "The Sound of Islam: Southeast Asian Boy Bands," *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World Review* 22, no. 35 (Autumn 2008): 24.

<sup>84</sup> Teddy Tardiana (singer, Snada), in discussion with the author, April 2007.

[It is better for women to appear only before other women if they perform publicly. For example, if their appearance is very interesting [appealing], maybe people won't be listening to their song, but only looking at their appearance. Whereas Islam tells us to protect what we see.]<sup>85</sup>

In other styles of Islamic popular music, performers are less concerned with men and women singing together on the same stage. For example, the rock band Dewa 19 (which will be discussed further in chapter 3) often employs female back-up singers and dancers, as does the gamelan fusion group Kiai Kanjeng (discussed further in chapter 4). In fact, the leader of that ensemble often performs with his wife, Novia Kolopaking, a well-known pop singer independent of her affiliations with Kiai Kanjeng.

Stylistically, nasyid continues to develop in often surprising ways. Especially since 2002, munsyid have included instrumental accompaniment, in what began as an entirely a cappella singing style. With few exceptions, the accompaniment is added electronically during production; the performers are singers rather than instrumentalists. When I visited a recording studio to talk about the production of nasyid, I learned that when instrumentals are added (usually synthesized), the vocal line remains dominant by being mixed at a higher volume than the instrumental line, sometimes as much as a 90:10 ratio.<sup>86</sup> This contrasts with other styles of Islamic popular music, such as Islamic rock, where the vocals are not overly emphasized. One rock musician, Pasha of the group Ungu, laughed at my question when I asked him if his band recorded the vocals of their Islamic songs at a higher volume during mixing. Instead, he stated that the vocal line is treated as “just another instrument” in the music ensemble for both their secular and religious songs.<sup>87</sup> Agus Idwar, a former nasyid singer and producer for the Jakarta-based music company, Forte Records, told me that in his opinion, recording the vocals louder

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<sup>85</sup> Abdullah Gymnastiar [Aa Gym], in discussion with the author, May 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Agus Idwar Jumhadi (producer, Nadahijrah, Forte Entertainment), in discussion with the author, June 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Pasha [Sigit Purnomo Syamsuddin Said] (singer, Ungu), in discussion with the author, May 2007.

than the synthesized instruments was critical for nasyid. In his definition, the lyrics are the most important aspect of the music and need to be clear enough to be immediately understood by audiences.<sup>88</sup>

Though nasyid is written in the harmonic language of Western popular music, munsyid craft an Arabic history from the etymology of the word in order to connect it to the Middle East, the site of Islam's birthplace. Indonesian munsyid often state that the word nasyid derives from the Arabic *nasyd*, translating it as "humming."<sup>89</sup> This interpretation inspires a vision of quiet, personal piety channeled through hushed tones. With this etymology, the emphasis of contemporary nasyid is personal devotion; the lyrics become secondary to inner faith and a meditative, willing heart offered in prayer.<sup>90</sup> When I asked Aa Gym why he encourages so much nasyid at his pesantren, he responded by stating that through the combination of the words with the music, an emotional and beautiful expression of faith emerges. He said, "sometimes I perform nasyid in order to raise up a sense...a feeling [rasa]...of beauty towards God...a love towards God" (*Saya kadang-kadang bernasyid. Itu adalah untuk meningkatkan "a sense" rasa keindahan terhadap Allah...cinta kepada Allah*).<sup>91</sup> His choice of the word *rasa* suggests multiple meanings, which in this case seems to evoke a sensibility of spirituality.<sup>92</sup> By aligning contemporary nasyid (a performance genre) with an Arabic word meaning humming and suggestive of introspection, nasyid shares a similar value with Sufism. Anthropologist Patrick Gaffney notes that Sufi ideology is often adapted by modes of "official Islam" to assist in

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<sup>88</sup> Agus Idwar, discussion.

<sup>89</sup> M. Irfan Hidayatullah (singer, Mupla), in discussion with the author, January 2007. Teddy, discussion. (In Java, there is no tradition of family names, so in the short form of the references, I have chosen the more common of the two names, hence Teddy and not Tiardana in this instance).

<sup>90</sup> Adjie Esa Poetra, *Revolusi Nasyid* (Bandung: MQS Publishing, 2004), 15.

<sup>91</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.

<sup>92</sup> Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). In her translation and analysis of a nineteenth-century epic poem, Florida discusses the variety of meanings of the Javanese word *rasa*. Because of the multitude implications of the word, she chooses to leave it in its original form in her own translations.

expressions of individual piety.<sup>93</sup> Nasyid, as a personal performed music, provides young Muslims with a “direct and intimate way” to express their spirituality.<sup>94</sup>

In each of my discussions with singers of nasyid, I was told that *what* munsyid sang was more important than *how* they sang it. As Aa Gym told me, “Yang lebih penting adalah kata-katanya, bukan musiknya” (The most important aspect [of nasyid] is the words, not the music).<sup>95</sup> The Indonesian nasyid scholar Asep Syasul Romli echoes this sentiment in his research. He writes that the primary aim of the genre is *dakwah*, or teaching others about Islam.<sup>96</sup> Commonly, the *dakwah* refers to public preaching about Islam by a leader to his or her followers. However, *dakwah* can also refer to an individual’s actions that inspire someone to learn about Islam, or provide an example of Islamic behavior. Definitions of the role of nasyid as a medium for *dakwah* differ according to performer. According to Aa Gym:

Nasyid bisa menjadi salah satu, a part of *dakwah*, tidak the whole *dakwah* by nasyid. Saya menggunakan sebagian-sebagian saja untuk improvisasi dalam *dakwah*. Tapi mungkin bagi orang yang bisa bernasyid, dan dia orang soleh, orang yang ikhlas salah satu bagian *dakwah*.  
[Nasyid can be a part of preaching, but not all [my] preaching is just through nasyid. I use it partly just for improvisation in my preaching. But maybe for a person who can sing nasyid and is a pious person, a person who is sincere, it can be a part of [his/her] preaching.]

While he only uses nasyid as an improvisational aspect of his preaching, he realizes that for others, singing might have a larger role. Still, he recognizes that even for munsyid, part of their *dakwah* is demonstrated by their personal piety and compassion.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, for a “true” munsyid’s music to become *dakwah*, he or she must internalize his or her own belief and then

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<sup>93</sup> Patrick D. Gaffney, “Popular Islam,” *The Annals of the American Academy* 524 (November 1992): 24.

<sup>94</sup> Barendregt, “Sound of Islam,” 125.

<sup>95</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.

<sup>96</sup> Asep Syasul M. Romli, *Kembalikan Nasyid Pada Khittahnya* (Bandung: Marja, 2006).

<sup>97</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.



adapt that inner faith to become didactic for others, through both musical and extra-musical methods.

For many munsyid, providing dakwah in music is the primary function of nasyid. Because of this belief one singer, Farihin of the ensemble Denting Hati, has dubbed the genre “dakwah-tainment.”<sup>98</sup> Performers provide an example for the listener, offering an image of a Muslim that is both pious and hip, and whose behaviors can be easily imitated. Extra-musical factors—such as a smiling and helpful disposition, adopting Islamic fashion, and a knowledge of basic Islamic principles—are as important to the performer as his or her singing ability.<sup>99</sup> Though dakwah is important for the composition of nasyid music, munsyid are not the primary givers of dakwah. That role is still fulfilled by preachers and scholars. Rather, munsyid are accessible icons for youth, teaching about Islam through entertainment.<sup>100</sup> Performances of nasyid most often occur before or during religious speeches by established Muslim leaders, at rallies of Islamic political parties, or during religious events at public and private schools.<sup>101</sup> Performers are aware that their collaboration at such an event might be seen as collusion between their religious perspectives and those of the event’s main objective, even though they rarely attend the whole event.<sup>102</sup>

Nasyid is marketed as a contemporary music for urban Muslim youth who wish to follow secular music trends but are unwilling to sacrifice traditional and religious morals.<sup>103</sup> It provides a “parent-friendly” alternative to secular popular music, separate from drug or sex scandals that seem to follow many Indonesian secular artists. In performance, as well as in video recordings,

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<sup>98</sup> Farihin Abdul Fatah (singer, Denting Hati), in discussion with the author, January 2007.

<sup>99</sup> Irfan, discussion.

<sup>100</sup> Farihin, discussion.

<sup>101</sup> Deden Supriadi (singer, Edcoustic), in discussion with the author, February 2007.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Barendregt, “Sound of Islam,” 24.

munsyid stylistically draw from secular popular groups, such as boy-bands like the Backstreet Boys; in this way, nasyid is seen to be “modern” rather than “traditional.”<sup>104</sup> Adjectives that might describe the “modern” include that which is new, in flux, hybrid and radical; those that might describe the traditional include rooted, codified, conventional, and conservative. While the “traditional” versus the “modern” are in reality not two separate worlds but are constantly informing and re-informing one another, this dichotomy is perceived as being very real. Certain Islamic boarding schools associated with “traditional” Islamic organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama do not allow students to sing nasyid, but instead promote traditional music genres (such as qasidah, merawis, and shalawat). Meanwhile, schools associated with “modern” Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah encourage nasyid as a valuable extra-curricular activity. Ultimately, however, these decisions are left up to the individual pesantren, and none of the larger Islamic organizations take a stance regarding the appropriateness of nasyid. Even though nasyid is commonly thought of as “modern,” perhaps one of the reasons that nasyid is able to maintain a large following is that it functions as both traditional and modern. Through the lyrics and ethical performance style, artists adhere to “traditional” Muslim values while simultaneously catering to Western liberalism via musical language and capitalist marketing strategies.

## **2.2 K.H. ABDULLAH GYMNASIAR AND THE PESANTREN DAARUT TAUHIID**

At the height of nasyid’s popularity in Indonesia, while musically it seemed inseparable from Raihan’s artistic vision, theologically it was entwined with the philosophies of spiritual leader K.

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<sup>104</sup> Teddy, discussion.

H. Abdullah Gymnastiar (b. Jan. 24, 1962) of northern Bandung in West Java.<sup>105</sup> This popular preacher, known familiarly as Aa Gym,<sup>106</sup> became a religious icon in the late 1990s, and is leader (*kyai*) of the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren in the region of Geger Kalong, Bandung. Though his popularity dropped dramatically in 2006 after the Indonesian press revealed that he had been practicing polygamy, his position as a public leader for conservative Islam remains influential.<sup>107</sup>



**Figure 6. Aa Gym with his two wives, Rini and Ninih, during their first public photo opportunity in June, 2007<sup>108</sup>**

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<sup>105</sup> Bandung, just two hours from the country's capital, Jakarta, is the fourth largest city in Indonesia after Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan. It is known for its cooler climate because of its higher elevation, and was developed first as a prison because of its remote location, and secondly as a former seat of government during Dutch Colonial rule. It is the ethnic home to the Sundanese, conquered by the Javanese during the Majapahit dynasty around 1580 CE, who still maintain a unique language and distinctive cultural characteristics.

<sup>106</sup> Aa is Sundanese for “older brother” and is a common term of address indicating both respect and familiarity or closeness. Gym is taken from his second name, Gymnastiar.

<sup>107</sup> James B. Hoesterey, “The Rise, Rall, and Re-Branding of a Celebrity Preacher” *Inside Indonesia* 90 (October-December 2007).

<sup>108</sup> Photo taken by James Hoesterey.

Aa Gym's rise to fame is remarkable considering that he was not formally schooled in Islam until he was an adult and already head of a growing Islamic movement. From a military family but unable to enter the army himself, he struggled to make ends meet through various start-up businesses, selling pins and working as a freelance public transportation driver. Aa Gym's life changed irrevocably after experiencing a dream where he prayed with the Prophet Muhammad. This is significant in that, in certain Indonesian Sufi traditions, meeting the prophet in a dream is believed to be meeting him in earnest. Only after this dream did he begin a serious study of Islam. He surrounded himself with like-minded individuals, made the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca with his wife, and began developing the Islamic theology upon which he would build his career.<sup>109</sup>

Though the term "charismatic leader" has been contested as having little value in scholarly discourse,<sup>110</sup> the cult of fame surrounding Aa Gym can partly be understood through Weber's understanding of the phrase. A charismatic leader possesses:

"a unique and personal power to shape the meaning of existence during a time of social crisis and to convince a group of people to commit themselves to his vision... The system of meaning which the charismatic leader creates must be clothed in novel, personal, and emotional insights which continuously capture the imagination of the believers and convince them to follow him without question."<sup>111</sup>

Though Weber emphasizes the spontaneity of charisma that cannot survive once it has been bureaucratized, Aa Gym's appeal adheres to Edward Shils' analysis that charisma can be established within the formal structures of society.<sup>112</sup> In fact, Aa Gym's charisma is reproduced and distributed through the mainstream media institutions of television, radio, and production

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<sup>109</sup> Enung Asmaya, *Aa Gym: Dai Sejuk dalam Masyarakat Majemuk* (Jakarta: Hikmah, 2003): 61-70.

<sup>110</sup> William Spinrad, "Charisma: A Blighted Concept and an Alternative Formula," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 295-311.

<sup>111</sup> Abdul Hamid el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977): 236.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

studios of his pesantren, emitting his personal magnetism into the homes of thousands of Indonesian Muslims. This model of Aa Gym as a charismatic leader is particularly apt when considering Benedict Anderson's theory of power in Java. He writes that historically, Javanese power is transferred immediately from one leader to the next arbitrarily, sometimes based on proximity alone, and it is the role of the populace to keep alert for that transition.<sup>113</sup> Even at the height of his popularity, media pundits appraised Aa Gym's popularity as a power transference from the admired conservative leader Zainuddin MZ, who fell out of favor with conservative Muslims upon entering politics. Later, in the vacuum created by Aa Gym's sudden descent from popularity, media analysts looked to see who would replace him; many names were suggested including the celebrity preacher and singer Ustadz Jefri and the moderate Muslim leader Yusuf Mansur.<sup>114</sup>

Aa Gym's pesantren Daarut Tauhiid is located in a residential community of Bandung, just blocks away from an area known for gambling and drinking, both of which are prohibited in Islam. What began as a religious study group for several of Aa Gym's friends attracted an increasing number of followers until a new style of pesantren was born. Beginning in 1990, buildings were bought throughout the surrounding neighborhood as needed; a mosque was built by volunteer labor; and classes were offered to meet the demand of increasing numbers of students (*santri*). Considered to be a "modern" pesantren as opposed to a "traditional" one, Daarut Tauhiid is open to the neighboring community rather than being enclosed by four walls. Moreover, the facilities at the pesantren are technologically savvy: Aa Gym's sermons are all

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<sup>113</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Jakarta: First Equinox Edition, 2006): 31.

<sup>114</sup> James B. Hoesterey, an anthropologist who lived and studied at Daarut Tauhiid for two years, wrote in the aftermath of Aa Gym's polygamy that Aa Gym's "conspicuous absence from Ramadhan television suggests that the gatekeepers of television would rather market new idols than rebrand old icons" specifically naming Yusuf Mansur as "one of these new idols." James B. Hoesterey, "The Rise, Fall, and Re-Branding of a Celebrity Preacher" *Inside Indonesia* 90 (October-December 2007). <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-90/aa-gym> (accessed February 24, 2008).

recorded and archived, internet cafes and ATM machines are available on the facility, and weekly announcements are pre-recorded in video-documentary fashion and played at the mosque during the weekly staff/devotional meetings.

Aa Gym's philosophies are summed up in his self-help styled business conglomerate that grew up around his pesantren, entitled Mangamen Qolbu (Heart Management) or MQ. His business model is a holistic approach to making religion a palpable and effective force in a person's life. His preaching combines a medley of religious and secular works, borrowing equally from eminent Islamic theologians such as al-Ghazali and self-help business books. His speech is famous for its simplicity, and his messages are often packaged in easy to remember slogans, many of which are framed and hung on the walls of his pesantren. For example, his students memorize the 3M's of living: 1) *Mulai dengan diri sendiri* (Start with yourself); 2) *Mulai dengan yang kecil* (Start with the small things); and 3) *Mulai sekarang* (Start now). The accessibility of Aa Gym's preaching through its easily understood language is grounded in the New Islamic intellectual movement of the 1980s, which provided a socio-political voice for Muslims during the last years of the New Order regime, a regime that historically had suppressed the role of Islam in the state. The Islamic intellectuals strive for the creation of an improved political infrastructure on a grass-roots level and a reformulation of Islamic politics on an inclusionary basis, in order to synthesize notions of Islamic-ness and Indonesian-ness.<sup>115</sup>

Aa Gym teaches that the successful modernization of the Indonesian nation is inherently rooted in the economic success of the individual. A self-made millionaire himself, he owns over twenty companies ranging from restaurants to Muslim drinking products. He encourages his followers to follow his example through his published books such as *Aku Tidak Mau Kaya, Tapi Saya Harus Kaya* (I Don't Want to Be Rich, But I Have To Be Rich).

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<sup>115</sup> Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 88.

One of Aa Gym's most often quoted remarks is his justification of capitalism through Islam, saying "Muhammad was a businessman too." Because of his advocacy of Western capitalist models and shows of Arabic piety, Aa Gym is often associated with the modernist civic Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, and as such, more orthodox schools of Islam. Yet Aa Gym does not limit himself by subscribing to one civic organization over another. Businessmen and women come from throughout Indonesia and from all types of civic Islamic backgrounds to attend his seminars. There they learn to: allow their workplaces to become centers of spiritual fulfillment; enrich their daily lives through religion; and begin the process of cultivating a more spiritual nation-state of Indonesia. Through team-building exercises (which can be as exotic as walking on hot coals), attendees learn methods of achieving employee solidarity as well as individual meditation techniques to handle personnel related problems. By creating a more Islam-centered working environment, Aa Gym aims to build a labor industry in Indonesia that will be more economically self-sufficient.

### **2.3 AA GYM'S LEADERSHIP POSITION IN INDONESIAN NASYID**

"Nama Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) tidak bisa dilepaskan dari perkembangan seni nasyid sebab memiliki peranan besar memakmurkan seni nasyid di negeri ini" (The name Aa Gym cannot be separated from the development of the nasyid, because of the large role he has played in sponsoring the nasyid arts in Indonesia)," says Adjie Esa Poetra, the first Indonesian nasyid scholar and vocal trainer from Bandung.<sup>116</sup> In a short chapter devoted to Aa Gym in his book on Indonesian nasyid, Poetra repeats this claim three times, while delving into an inventory of Aa's

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<sup>116</sup> Poetra, *Revolusi Nasyid*, 79.

relative importance to the genre. This perceived intertwining between the genre nasyid and this popular Bandung preacher has become so widespread, that in the aftermath of his polygamy and the scandal in the press that followed, artists carefully extricated themselves from his persona, while still retaining vocal loyalty to the man to whom many attribute their early successes. Teddy, of the nasyid group Snada, recalled that in the first months of Aa Gym's scandal, he would directly ask his audiences permission before performing Aa Gym's compositions, especially with the song "Jagalah Hati," his group's first hit song.<sup>117</sup> While the association between Aa Gym and nasyid is often personal and not well documented, Aa Gym and his pesantren Daarut Tauhiid still contribute to and impact nasyid styles.

As a preacher, Aa Gym incorporates nasyid into his sermons through his own singing, and by engaging the services of local, national, and international nasyid groups during a preaching event. By featuring nasyid music, he supports the notion that this form of popular music is not only permissible (*halal*)<sup>118</sup> in Islam but a desirable pastime with religious value. This is further strengthened when Aa Gym himself sings, sometimes interjecting a melody between lines of his sermons or singing in entirety a song that he has composed. His singing reinforces his remarks through repetition, lightens the atmosphere with music, and rejuvenates his audiences, many of whom have been sitting in rapt attention for hours. Several of Aa Gym's personal compositions have been made famous through cover versions by popular Indonesian artists, such as the nasyid group Snada's cover of "Jagalah Hati" in 2002 and "Istighfar," performed by the late rock star and religious leader Gito Rollies in 2007. While Aa Gym indicates that these songs are more poetic interpretations of his theology than nasyid works, he is

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<sup>117</sup> "Boleh, nggak, kita main lagu-lagu Aa Gym?" (Is it ok if we perform a song by Aa Gym?), to which the audience responds somewhat reluctantly, "Boleh..." (You may). Teddy, discussion.

<sup>118</sup> Nasyid's *halal* status, as opposed to *haram* (forbidden), is rarely argued in Indonesia. One common distinction is that while nasyid is *halal*, the manner and style in which it is performed could be improved in order for it to be a more useful tool of dakwah.



pleased that they have been thusly adopted by Indonesian munsyid.<sup>119</sup> In these cover versions, audience members still remember their associations to Aa Gym, as illustrated by Snada's precursory request of their audiences for permission to perform "Jagalah Hati" during a time of outcry against the public figure.

Aa Gym engages nasyid groups during a preaching event by asking them to sing before or after his sermons, as entertainment to ready followers for his sermons and inspire them to reflect on and embody his teachings as they leave the mosque and reenter their daily life. A nasyid concert within the otherwise spoken format of his preaching is one of the highlights of preaching events; the music serves both as a spiritual conduit and as entertainment. Through his selection of nasyid bands, Aa Gym informs the public ear as to which artists are salient to hear. Furthermore, his invitations to nasyid artists provide a space for them to be heard and a chance for their music to become popular. As many of Aa Gym's programs are broadcast nationally, new munsyid are encouraged to pursue their musical vocation and newly forming bands travel to Daarut Tauhiid seeking opportunities to perform. Moreover, like other types of Indonesian entrepreneurs, band members view Aa Gym as a spiritual leader, especially given his patronage for their profession. Artists often travel to his Islamic school as if on pilgrimage, to strengthen their own understanding of Islam and bond together as a group. Once there, they may stay for weeks.

Nasyid pervades the musical atmosphere of Daarut Tauhiid. It is played as background music of the official restaurants, sung in seminars and performed in various locations throughout Daarut Tauhiid. However, its primary location is in three distinct subdivisions of Daarut Tauhiid, namely MQ TV (a local television station and video production house that also records live nasyid performance), MQFM (a national radio station that has several nasyid daily programs)

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<sup>119</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.

and MQ Productions (Aa Gym's center of audio production for "performance dakwah," including music dakwah nasyid performances.) Of these, the most relevant for guiding national opinion is MQFM, due to its national broadcast programs and higher public ratings. Additionally, song is one method of teaching MQ concepts in business training seminars. Participants learn music by participating in group singing, especially the song "Jagalah Hati," which acts a theme song for the core principles of Daarut Tauhiid. Through singing and breathing together, participants physically bond with one another and enjoy the togetherness of participation at the pesantren.

Of the locations in Daarut Tauhiid where music is cultivated, the most important for determining national opinion on nasyid is MQFM. Founded in 2000, MQFM is the first Indonesian radio station to be fully devoted to airing Islamic programs, despite a broader mission statement aimed at universal values.

Dengan membawa nuansa berbeda layaknya sebuah oase di tengah kegersangan rutinitas kehidupan, 102,7 MQFM hadir menemani aktivitas pendengar yang membutuhkan sentuhan ruhiyah untuk mengisi relung hati yang merindukan kedamaian, ketenangan dan kebeningan melalui sajian musik dan format siaran 102,7 MQFM berupa pencerahan dan kesejukan yang memberi manfaat, hikmah serta nilai-nilai akhlak yang mulia... MQ bersifat universal dan terbuka bagi semua kalangan masyarakat....

[By bringing together different nuances, appropriate for creating an oasis in the middle of the barrenness of the routine of daily life, 102.7 MQFM enters the activities of listeners who need the touch of the spirit in the depths of their hearts, yearning for peacefulness, calmness and clarity. Through the guest line-ups, music, and broadcasting format, 102.7 MQFM is one form of enlightenment and calmness that provides wisdom as well as the imparting righteous, moral values... MQ is characterized by its universalism and its openness to all social circles....]<sup>120</sup>

MQFM is Aa Gym's only media enterprise that broadcasts a portion of its programs nationally and has branch offices outside of MQ's Bandung headquarters. Though inspired by Aa Gym, the

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<sup>120</sup> Management Qolbu, 102.7 FM official Web site, "Beranda MQFM (Station News)," <http://www.mqfm.net/index.htm> (accessed July 21, 2008; site currently inactive).

radio station is run independently as a private business. While the station shares private sector concerns such as advertising and programming, the managers seek to address these issues based on their interpretations of Islamic philosophy. In the case of advertising, the managers select commercials that do not conflict with their beliefs as Muslims; for example they accept advertisements only from Sharia-style banks and refuse to give airtime to companies that sell prohibited (*haram*) items such as alcohol. Products that are not necessarily haram but deemed “questionable” raise considerable debate in the MQFM office before the managers come to a joint decision. For instance, MQFM managers decided that cigarette companies should not be permitted to advertise on their radio station because they felt that the addictive aspect of smoking was incompatible with the teachings of MQ.<sup>121</sup>

MQFM programming consists of: 1) Islamic music; 2) Aa Gym’s morning address to his followers; and 3) talk shows such as the program “Share and Care” that invite callers to call in and discuss issues on the air. MQFM, as the main radio distributor of nasyid has a large role in popularizing nasyid musical style. Prior to 2000, MQFM managers and deejays limited airtime to songs sung at a slow tempo and having (in their opinion) the intent to soothe the listener through song. After 2000, their tastes expanded to include a broader spectrum of musical styles that had “Islamic” lyrics, including rap, hip-hop, and jazz. Now, nasyid played on MQFM is not limited to Indonesian or Malaysian groups and some of the popular favorites include the British singer Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens) and the American rap artists Soldiers of Allah. Western groups are held in high esteem by Indonesian nasyid fans, because their presence in non-Muslim countries attests to the universalism that many believe to be inherent in the genre. As one deejay told me, she believes that an international presence on MQFM encourages

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<sup>121</sup> Nugi al-Afghani (MQFM director), in discussion with the author, January 2007.

Indonesian artists to experiment with diverse musical styles, by witnessing the global success of foreign artists in styles like rap, jazz, and hip-hop.<sup>122</sup>

Day-to-day decisions about what may or may not be aired on the radio station are a result of discussions between the management and Aa Gym. For example, when Aa Gym began distancing himself from female nasyid groups performing in front of mix-gendered audiences, MQFM followed suit by no longer playing female nasyid groups on the air. MQFM managers justified this by noting that it was impossible to tell if men were listening, and they were interested in protection of women's freedom. However, the decision not to play dangdut music with religious lyrics, such as that of so-called originator of dangdut, Rhoma Irama, was solely based upon the manager's belief that the music itself was tainted by its secular association.<sup>123</sup> Ultimately, all decisions about which performers and pieces get airplay are managerial, independent of Aa Gym.

The barometer for a hit nasyid song is determined by one of MQFM's programs, "Top Request." Songs are called in by request and ranked by popularity, which becomes one indication of the success of nasyid, many of whom are not on a major label and rarely make it to a platinum level of sales.<sup>124</sup> The nasyid group Edcooustic celebrates having several "Top Request" songs as a testament to their achievement as nasyid artists. Edcooustic is a visionary nasyid group that experimented with changing the style of nasyid to resemble a classic rock group. They consist of two vocalists on acoustic guitar, playing simple harmonies with simple messages, designed for a teenage audience. "We're trying to attract a fan base that doesn't want to sacrifice their carefree concerns of growing up because of strict Muslim contingents," stated

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<sup>122</sup> Dinita Melani Sari Masoe (MQFM employee), conversation with the author, December 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Nugi, discussion, cited such associations as erotic-style dancing and prostitution.

<sup>124</sup> In Indonesia, an album is platinum after legal sales reach 150,000 or more, a number derived to offset their large illegal market for recorded music.

the lead singer.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps because this philosophy mirrors Aa Gym, they are active participants at Daarut Tauhiid, not only performing often at MQ events and venues such as the MQ café. Furthermore, they were instrumental in creating a union for local munsyid that meets bi-monthly in the vicinity of the pesantren.

Edcoustic's message is exemplified in their first hit song, "Remaja Peduli" (Teenagers Care), the opening lines of which state:

Halo Kawan Sahabat	Hello Friends,
Muslim Tercinta,	Beloved Muslim friends
Kita sambut kemanapun berhagia,	We join everywhere in happiness
Mari kawan, ikutlah bersama kami	Let's go friends, join with us
Membela Risalah Islam di dunia	Defend the prophet of Islam in the world
Remaja peduli pintar dan mandiri	Caring, clever and independent teenagers
Kihat berprestasi untuk	The prestigious cause of
bersimbah Illahi	Worshiping God.

In this classic nasyid lyric, Edcoustic calls followers to join together in a positive, joyful manner to embrace the struggle of Islam. However, many of the group's songs have been highly criticized by ulama in West Java for "dumbing down" the rich potential of nasyid. Edcoustic acknowledges that their main source of hearing about these criticisms is through the call-in programs at MQFM. For example, one caller argued against the terminology used in their Japanese-language song "Kamisama." The translation for "Kamisama" is deity and this particular caller was highly insulted because it didn't indicate a monotheistic all powerful god, as the does the word "Allah," but could indicate one of a pantheon, as in the Indonesian word "Tuhan" or "Dewa." Both Edcoustic singers were shocked at this criticism, because they had written the song in Japanese to demonstrate solidarity with other Asian nationalities and were simply not sophisticated in the intricacies of the Japanese language to know their error.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Deden, discussion.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

Even critics who do not use the call-in format to make their remarks can use the programs at MQFM to make their criticisms of nasyid. For example, in his book *Kembalikan Nasyid Pada Khittahnya* (Returning Nasyid to its Roots), author Asep Syamsul M. Romli uses the program “Top Request” to single out groups that he considers in need of theological reform. He isolates Edcoustic for their song “Nantikanku di Batas Waktu” which he says is an example of the “many nasyid songs that are themed of sexual love, or love between two people, devotions between a couple, husband or wife, so that they are ‘dry’ [void] of dakwah” (*banyak nasyid yang bertema cinta-asmara atau kisah cinta dua sejoli, puja-puji kepada pasangan, calon suami atau istri, sehingga ‘kering’ pada dakwah*).<sup>127</sup> Citing its position as an MQFM “Top Request” song, Romli reproduces the lyrics in his book to illustrate how according to his definition of dakwah, the song does not fulfill the criterion that it should bring the listener closer to God (*mendekatkan diri pada Allah-nya*).<sup>128</sup> These types of discussions take place on and off the air, and are often situated within the margins of MQFM. In this way, MQFM assumes a position of importance as a discussion forum for which nasyid songs should, or should not, be popular.

## 2.4 AN EXEGESIS OF “JAGALAH HATI” THROUGH THE WRITINGS OF AL-GHAZALI

Of all of Aa Gym’s musical compositions, the best known is “Jagalah Hati,” which encapsulates and promotes the philosophies inherent in the teachings of the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren.

Playing the role of a theme song for his concept of Manajemen Qolbu, “Jagalah Hati” grows in

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<sup>127</sup> Romli, *Kembalikan Nasyid*, 74.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 76.

meaning as the listener's relationship with Aa Gym's theologies deepen. Partly because of its association with Daarut Tauhiid, "Jagalah Hati" is synonymous with Aa Gym's name. Beyond musicians linking the song to its composer during public performances, many news articles and other media forms introduce Aa Gym as the "Muslim leader made famous through his song 'Jagalah Hati'" (Dai yang dikenal dengan lagunya "Jagalah Hati")<sup>129</sup> even though Aa Gym's position as a national leader of the Indonesian Muslim community far exceeds one hit song. This song eclipses Aa Gym's previous musical works, almost to the point of obscuring them from public memory.

The lyrics to "Jagalah Hati" refer to two domains of human consciousness, an inner and outer realm within which humans simultaneously reside, experience life, and struggle. Whereas the outer world presents a vision of the results of our actions, the song lyrics indicate that this perceived control of our external circumstances is merely an illusion. One has no control over the outer realm, but this dimension has a greater potential to adversely affect mankind. It is the inner world—what Aa Gym calls the domain of the heart—that man has the ability to control through slow, careful study and inner reflection. Aa Gym calls his followers to observe a practice of subduing their hearts in order to help them exist peaceably within their environment and be able to deal effectively with worldly difficulties. A partial transcription of the text is as follows:

Chorus:	Jagalah hati jangan kau kotori Jagalah hati lentera hidup ini Jagalah hati jangan kau nodai Jagalah hati cahaya Illahi	Guard your heart, don't contaminate it, Guard your heart, the lantern of life, Guard your heart, don't disgrace it, Guard your heart, the light of God.
Verse 1:	Bila hati kian bersih Pikiranpun akan jernih Semangat hidup nan gigih	When your heart becomes clean, Then your thoughts become clear; The spirit of life that is persevering,

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<sup>129</sup> Aa Gym Tampil di Acara Talk Show <<http://www.info-baru.com/2007/12/aa-gym-tampil-di-acara-talk-show.html>> Accessed August 30, 2008.

	Prestasi mudah diraih Namun bila hati keruh Batin selalu gemuruh Seakan di kejar musuh Dengan Allah kian jauh	Performance is easily achieved. Yet when the heart is cloudy The inner spirit is always tumultuous; As if chased by an enemy, God becomes further away.
Verse 2:	Bila hati kian suci Tak ada yang tersakiti Pribadi menawan hati Ciri mu'min sejati Namun bila hati busuk Pikiran jahat merasuk Akhlak kian terpuruk Jadi makhluk terkutuk	When the heart grows more pure There is nothing that can hurt it; Individuals subdue their heart, The characteristics of a true believer; Yet when your heart is spoiled Evil thoughts possess you, Morals are buried deeply, The creature is cursed.
Verse 3:	Bila hati kian lapang Hidup sempit terasa senang Walau kesulitan datang Dihadapi dengan tenang Tapi bila hati sempit Segalanya jadi rumit Seakan terus menghimpit Lahir batin terasa sakit	When the heart grows more open Then a narrow life feels content; Although difficulties come They are faced with peacefulness, But when the heart becomes narrow Everything becomes complicated, As if everything is continually squeezed; The outer and inner spirit feels pain.

[To listen to this song, refer to the attached sound file, AaGym\_JagalahHati.mp3.]

In this song, Aa Gym uses the heart as a metaphor for spirituality and life force. While the heart as metaphor for spirituality is common throughout many forms of Muslim theology, it is most reminiscent of Sufi mysticism in which the concept of love of the divine is often expressed in language of earthly love. In “Jagalah Hati,” the heart is an element of God working within mankind, and thus the responsibility of each person to guard and protect. Aa Gym admonishes the listener not to “contaminate” (*kotori*) the heart and thereby “disgrace” (*nodai*) man’s link to God. Aa Gym uses light imagery to describe the heart, calling it the “lantern of this life” (*lentera hidup ini*) and the “light of God” (*Cahaya Illahi*.) The use of light imagery places the heart symbol as a reflection of God’s presence in human life. Though reason and man’s



relationship with the outer world may dim or pollute the heart, the heart is a force beyond reason; if kept pure, it can help mankind overcome difficult situations in the outer world.

The language of the song's chorus—that the heart is the “light of God” and should be kept pure—is evocative of the language used by one of Islam's most important thinkers, the Sufi scholar Abu Hamed Mohammad ibn Mohammad al-Ghazali. Aa Gym often quotes al-Ghazali in his speeches and writings, including his text *Jagalah Hati: Step by Step Managemen Qolbu*, which espouses the philosophies of Managemen Qolbu. In the introduction of that text, Aa Gym uses al-Ghazali's metaphor of the body as a kingdom to support his own analogy of the importance of the heart to Islam. He quotes al-Ghazali as saying “the body of mankind can be likened to a kingdom, where the heart is its king” (Tubuh manusia diibaratkan sebagai sebuah kerajaan, maka hati tak lain adalah rajanya).<sup>130</sup> As a scholar of Islam, al-Ghazali's greatest contribution was to bring the suppositions of mysticism within the framework of Islamic law, acting as a mediator between the intellectual and spiritual tensions between Sharia and Sufism that existed around 1100 CE. In this, Aa Gym shares something in common with al-Ghazali, as he offers a spiritual path towards his followers through his self-help philosophies and practices like ritual weeping, side-by-side with the teachings of Islamic law.

Al-Ghazali was a professor of theology in Baghdad, who suffered a spiritual crisis in 1095 CE, but rediscovered his faith in Islam by living the life of a Sufi mystic. In his book *Deliverance from Error*, which is an autobiographical sketch of his struggle towards finding God, al-Ghazali writes of the heart-light metaphor that (900 years later) inspired Aa Gym:

I owed my deliverance, not to a concatenation of proofs and arguments, but to the light which God caused to penetrate into my heart—the light which illuminates the threshold of all knowledge. To suppose that certitude can be based upon formal arguments is to limit the boundless mercy of God. Someone asked the

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<sup>130</sup> Abdullah Gymnastiar, *Jagalah Hati: Step by Step Managemen Qolbu* (Bandung: Khas MQ, 2005), xvii.

Prophet the explanation of this passage in the Divine Book: “God opens to Islam the heart of him whom he chooses to direct.”

That is spoken,” replied the Prophet, “of the light which God sheds in the heart.”

“And how can man recognize that light?” he was asked.

“By his detachment from this world of illusion and by a secret drawing toward the eternal world,” the Prophet replied.”<sup>131</sup>

The lyrics of “Jagalah Hati” teach the same lesson, that man must follow the “light which God sheds in the heart” rather than be taken in by worldly “illusions.” Aa Gym’s lyrics urge the withdrawal of the listener from worldly evils, to live a “narrow life” (*hidup sempit*) without temptation. Though Aa Gym does not explicitly state that this is a principle of Sufism, the reader of al-Ghazali will remember his definition of the Sufi’s objective: “The Aim which the Sufis set before them is as follows: To free the soul from the tyrannical yoke of the passions, to deliver it from its wrong inclinations and evil instinct, in order that in the purified heart there should only remain room for God and for the invocation of his holy name.”<sup>132</sup>

Aa Gym clarifies man’s relationship with the inner and outer realms of worldliness and spirituality; the verses to his song alternate between detailing the differences of a pure and an impure heart. Following the language of al-Ghazali, those who cultivate a “pure heart” (*hati suci*) have the characteristics of a true believer (*ciri mu’min sejati*). They are delivered from harm (*tak ada yang tersakiti*) and from their evil instincts or thoughts (*pikiran jahat*.) Signs of a pure heart include clarity of thinking, energy for life, easily achievable results, freedom from pain, calmness, and peaceful approaches to dealing with difficulties. Signs of an unhealthy heart include anxiety, restlessness, wickedness, immorality, feelings of constant complication, and pain.

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<sup>131</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Dalal) and Five Key Texts*, 3rd ed., translated by R. J. McCarthy (Cambridge: Fons Vitae, 2000), 42.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

## 2.5 COMPARING VERSIONS OF THE SONG “JAGALAH HATI”

Of the musical recordings, the most famous version of “Jagalah Hati” is not that of Aa Gym singing, but the 2002 release by the nasyid group Snada. As the singer Teddy of Snada relates, he was an admirer of Aa Gym, heard the song, and asked permission to cover it in a more upbeat tempo. Aa Gym consented and Snada’s version of “Jagalah Hati” became a hit song practically overnight. Snada’s album that contains the song, *Neo Shalawat*,<sup>133</sup> became the first nasyid album in Indonesia, and the group’s only album, to achieve platinum record sales. Following Snada’s release of “Jagalah Hati,” the song became a point of interest for Indonesian munsyid, and many new versions were commercially recorded and covered during public performance. In Snada’s video of this song, the last scene of “Jagalah Hati” concludes with the cameras focusing on the smiling face of Aa Gym, putting his hand to his heart and then raising it to viewers, in the symbol that Snada members invented to represent “guarding the heart.” Teddy of Snada felt that it was important to have Aa Gym in the video, both to acknowledge him as the composer and to signify his philosophies (that the song was designed to represent) for the viewers. Comparing Aa Gym’s original version with those that came afterwards illustrates how well the song’s intent as a theme song for Daarut Tauhiid was carried out and suggests an overall musical arc for the nasyid genre over time.

In this section I compare three versions arranged by groups that have strong relationships with the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren: Aa Gym accompanied by MQ Voice; Snada; and the New MQ Voice, as listed in figure 7.

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<sup>133</sup> Shalawat is the genre of Muslim songs based on Arabic prayers; Neo Shalawat then indicates a new kind of Arabic prayer.

Performer (or Arranger)	Date	Duration
Aa Gym; MQ Voice	written 1998, released 2005	9.20 min.
Snada	released 2002	4.27 min.
New MQ Voice	released 2006	3.20 min.

**Figure 7. Three versions of “Jagalah Hati” compared in chapter 2**

The private and professional relationships of these groups with Aa Gym and his pesantren help explain why they chose to record this particular song and how they gained knowledge of the song’s other renditions. I chose these versions for this study based upon their widespread availability in the religious sections of music stores in Jakarta and Bandung and also in the Daarut Tauhiid general store’s music section. In addition, each provides a unique adaptation of the song that reflects trends in nasyid over the past decade.

### **2.5.1 “Jagalah Hati” performed by Aa Gym and MQ Voice**

In 2005, Aa Gym released the album *Nasihat dalam Nasyid: Jagalah Hati* (Advice in Nasyid: Jagalah Hati), which included a version of “Jagalah Hati” with Aa Gym singing lead vocals, accompanied by MQ Voice, a leading nasyid group from his pesantren. The name MQ Voice is significant, in that it connotes a leadership responsibility for the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren, being the voice of Manajemen Qolbu, the heart management philosophy underlying the pesantren’s many programs. Despite the later release date, Aa Gym’s version of “Jagalah Hati” is indicative of how he performs nasyid during sermons, and in comparison with versions by other nasyid recording artists, it provides an accurate vision of his original conception of the song.

The length and pacing of Aa Gym's version contrasts with the other two versions. By far the longest one is Aa Gym's recording, which contains nine verses whereas most groups reduce the song to three verses. I conjecture that verses are omitted from most versions because they restate the textual message of the three most common stanzas and are not found in Aa Gym's lyrics printed in his book of the same title, which positions the song "Jagalah Hati" as a device to discuss the Heart Management philosophies of his pesantren. Additionally, Aa Gym's version is much slower (quarter note = 60, or one beat per second, as opposed to the faster quarter note = 92 or 108 in the other two recordings), which also lends a ballad-like feel to the piece. I offer a rough transcription of the first two choruses and first verse below (figure 8).

# Jagalah Hati, version A

## Performed by Aa Gym and New MQ Voice

**Intro**

**Chorus 1**

*freely*

*mf*

*mp*

Ooh - - - - -

- ngan kau ko-tor-i, Ja - ga-lah ha-ti, len-ter - a hi-dup in-i. Ja - ga-la ha-ti, Ja -

- ngan kau no-da-i, Ja - ga-lah ha-ti, ca-ha - ya - Il - la-hi. Bi-la ha - ti ki-an ber-sih, ber-fi-kir-

- pun sla-lu-u jer - nih s'ma-ngat hi-dup-kan gi-gih, pre-sta - si mu-dah di-ra - ih. Ta-pi, bi -

17. - la ha-ti bu - suk, pi - ki - ran ja - hat me - ra - suk, A - khlak ki - an ter - pu - ruk, bi - ar ja -

- - - - - Aah

**Chorus 2**

20. - di ma-khluk ter-ku-tuk. 21. Ja - ga-lah ha-ti 22. ja - ngan kau - ko - tor-i 23. Ja - ga-lah ha-ti len-ter-

Ooh - - - - - Ja - ga-lah ha-ti ja - ngan kau - ko - tor-i Ja - ga-lah ha-ti len-ter-

**p**

24. - a hi-dup in - i. 25. Ja - ga-lah ha-ti, 26. ja - ngan kau no-da-i, 27. Ja - ga-lah ha-ti, ca-ha-

- a hi-dup in - i. Ja - ga-lah ha-ti, ja - ngan kau no-da-i, Ja - ga-lah ha-ti, ca-ha-

28. - ya - Il - la - hi.

- ya - Il - la - hi.

**Figure 8. "Jagalah Hati" as recorded by Aa Gym and MQ Voice, beginning through second chorus<sup>134</sup>**

This nine-minute version demands a greater focus from the listener than the average two- to three-minute pop-nasyid song. The piece outlines the two minor chords in the melody of both the verse and chorus, providing little harmonic change to stimulate listeners. Each of the nine verses is a double quatrain, wherein the first four lines ruminate on the joys of a well-guarded

<sup>134</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all transcriptions are mine.

heart, and the four lines of the rejoinder warn against the dangers of an unruly heart. The similar sentiments shared by the successive verses are one characteristic of mystical, highly introspective poetry.

I conjecture that this lack of harmonic, rhythmic, and lyrical variety for the listener forms a structure that contributes to the song's success. The constant repetition of phrases brings the listener into a prayerful state, similar to trance-like meditation. By each stating the same philosophy, the verses act as pivots around which the listener's meditation is centered. The chorus (repeated sixteen times throughout the course of the song), provides the moral imperative of the song and acts as a beacon, which returns listeners from any mental meanderings they experience. Since the basic message in the verses is static (varying in its presentation only slightly), should the listeners' attention wander in their meditation on a particular passage, they may still actively engage with the message of the song.

The simplicity of the song's structure reflects Aa Gym's preaching style, which is famous for explicating important aspects of Islamic theology through repetitive and easy-to-remember slogans. Aa Gym's main achievement as a theologian has been making Islam more accessible for Indonesian middle-class people who are otherwise struggling with the difficulties of adhering to an apparently strict religion in the confusion of a society in the crises of modernity, regime changing, and (when the song was written) the fear of disintegrating national unity. Using nasyid to elucidate one of al-Ghazali's basic teachings exemplifies this type of achievement, as Aa Gym makes historical theology accessible and instructive through the trappings of a contemporary pop-music phenomenon. Musically, the slow pace ensures that the listener is paying attention to the main message of the song, while the repeating key points insure that Aa Gym's message is made clear.



### 2.5.2 “Jagalah Hati” performed by Snada

Though Aa Gym’s is the conceptual inspiration, it is Snada’s version that popularized the song and piqued the public’s interest. Snada sings three verses, speeding up the tempo (to quarter note = 120) and adding a synthesized percussion beat behind the voices.<sup>135</sup> Not all of Snada’s songs are sung with synthesized backup; many are performed a cappella, especially on their earlier albums. Teddy of Snada states that the addition of percussion on this particular song was a conscious choice on the part of the performers, as they hoped to provide more rhythmic interest for their listeners.<sup>136</sup> [To listen to this version, refer to the attached sound file, Snada\_JagalahHati.mp3.]

Instead of having one lead singer accompanied by a men’s chorus (as in Aa Gym’s version), each of the Snada singers takes a turn performing part of the melody as a solo—switching every two lines—and joining in the harmony with the rest of the chorus. When the lead singer performs his solo during the verses, the other munsyid provide rhythmic vocables in harmony beneath main melody. In contrast, the choruses are performed entirely in four-part harmony, which gives this part of the song an aura of unity. In other words, in the chorus, the singers come together to deliver the main message of the song, while during the verses the individuals ruminate separately on what it means to “guard the heart.” There is very little variation between each repetition of the verse and choruses. The entire song is repeated twice through, after which the chorus is sung three times. The only musical variation is during the

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<sup>135</sup> View Snada’s version of “Jagalah Hati” on Youtube at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kxKHPfWgU&feature=Playlist&p=E8752C4B185D477F&playnext\\_from=PL&playnext=1&index=15](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kxKHPfWgU&feature=Playlist&p=E8752C4B185D477F&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=15) (accessed July 14, 2010).

<sup>136</sup> Teddy, discussion.

penultimate repetition of the chorus when a descant is added above the other parts. The song's message is driven home by the repeating chorus at the end of the piece. There is very little rhythmic variation, which is one of the most noticeable differences between Snada's and Aa Gym's versions. In their video of the song, Snada's performers add another rhythmic element by pressing their hands first to their heart twice and then outwards, palm facing the camera, which emphasizes the rhythm on beats 1 – 3. The structural form of the music is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Form of "Jagalah Hati," as performed by Snada**

Intro	Intro	4 bars	
A	Chorus	8 bars	chorus parts
B	Verse1	8 bars	solo with rhythmic backup
A	Chorus	8 bars	
B	Verse2	8 bars	
A	Chorus	8 bars	
B	Verse3	8 bars	
A	Chorus	8 bars	
C	Music Interlude	8 bars	percussion only
A	Chorus	8 bars	quieter
A	Chorus	8 bars	louder
B1	Verse1	8 bars	some melodic variation
A	Chorus	8 bars	
B	Verse2'(Hay)	8 bars	end line has some melodic variation
A1	Chorus'	8 bars	an additional melody is added above the chorus
A1	Chorus'	8 bars	continue added vocal line
Coda	Coda	4 bars	vocals only

Most of the musical accompaniment is synthesized and the musical experience seems devoid of any specific ethnic or religious affiliation. However, in the final two repetitions of the chorus, a single male voice adds a descant above the other voices, in a common non-metrical melismatic singing style, similar to that in any number of Qur'anic recitation styles. When I listened to this juxtaposition over the diatonic harmonies and straightforward 4/4 rhythms, it immediately reminded me of the vocals performed by Algerian Rai singer Cheb Mami in the Sting song "Desert Rose," which was popular in Indonesia at the time of Snada's arrangement of "Jagalah Hati." When interviewing one of the tenors of the ensemble, Teddy, I asked him if this was his intention. He smiled appreciatively when I asked him, saying that he'd enjoyed that particular song and artist very much, so in all probability there might be a connection.<sup>137</sup> While the possibilities are endless as to how the members of Snada stumbled upon that particular musical idea, I find it illuminating that certain musical nuances are equally capable of being informed by secular and religious sources, interchangeably.

The incorporation of this melismatic singing style illustrates how both secular and religious Arabic performance styles are incorporated into nasyid musics. As Birgit Berg has demonstrated in her study of the Indonesian music style gambus, icons of Arabic culture have become indicators of Islamic authenticity in the past several decades, and artists strive to validate their position as Islamic leaders by placing these signifiers within their music. Not all Indonesians accept this trend of "Arabization" as being equivalent to "Islamization" especially as it can allow secular elements to enter Islamic understandings if anything of Middle Eastern origin in Indonesia is deemed to be an authentic celebration of Islam.<sup>138</sup> If indeed the Algerian Rai singers were a source of inspiration for Snada, they would be a case in point, as many are

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<sup>137</sup> Teddy, discussion.

<sup>138</sup> Birgit Berg, "Presence and Power of the Arab Idiom in Indonesian Islamic Musical Arts," *Conference on Music in the World of Islam* (August 2007), 8.

actually Jewish. Whatever the case, many *munsyid* feel that referencing the Middle East—Islam’s birthplace and site of its most sacred grounds—gives them added authenticity as Muslims.<sup>139</sup>

Snada members, who state that their musical influences come from boy bands such as Boyz II Men, also name Aa Gym as one of their spiritual advisors. Without claiming any direct affiliation with him, members of Snada have traveled in pilgrimage to the Daarut Tauhiid pesantren for musical workshops and collaborated in concert with Aa Gym during his preaching at mosques in Jakarta and West Java. Though they claim artistic and spiritual independence from any Muslim leaders, this independence is not always clear in their collaborative output. For example, in one of Aa Gym’s promotional videos produced at Daarut Tauhiid, Snada members are seated on the floor before Aa Gym, who is raised on a pedestal. This suggests deference to Aa Gym as a spiritual master, since they sit before him as students would before a teacher. When they sing songs in between his preaching segments, they further exemplify this “pupil to master” dynamic by asking permission to perform, to which Aa Gym acquiesces. After Snada finishes singing, Aa Gym prays that their style of musical prayer is an acceptable offering before God. I view this as a possible attempt by Aa Gym to defer criticism from more conservative Muslims, who might say that popular music styles are an inappropriate expression of religiosity. However, I also believe that his posture demonstrates an adherence to the relativist philosophies of al-Ghazali, whose treatise on music maintains that it is the responsibility of the individual to decide if music is being used properly to glorify God. According to al-Ghazali, theologians should determine if music is haram (forbidden) or halal (allowed) on a case-by-case basis, by examining the qualities of the music. To be halal the singer should have a pleasing voice, as the Qur’an repeatedly praises a beautiful voice; the structure and rhythm of the piece

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

should be balanced; and the lyrics should endorse Islamic values. If the effect of the music on the listener is halal, then so is the music.<sup>140</sup> Without explicitly referencing al-Ghazali's principles, the director of MQFM and other members of the Daarut Tauhiid staff consistently mentioned these same rules in my interviews; a nasyid song should not be too harsh, the singer should have a pleasant voice, the song must inspire peace and love, and it must bring people closer to God.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps it is to this aim that Aa Gym prays that Snada's voice and style of music should both be pleasing before God and constructive for listeners in the beauty and way of Islam.

Snada's interpretation of this song set in motion their rise to fame in Indonesia; they became the only nasyid boy-band group from Indonesia to transcend what appeared to be the boundaries of nasyid—a specialized fan base with few recording opportunities—by getting a contract with a major recording label and recording a platinum album. Other nasyid groups followed Snada's interpretation, regularizing the rhythm and paring down the verses to three or four. Variations between these versions are often slight, such as the addition of synthesized strings in the version by The Fikr, or singing a cappella but with the rhythmic regularity and tempo of the Snada version, as in the performance by Denting Hati.<sup>142</sup> While Snada's upbeat version of the song became very popular, it does not convey the meditative aspect of Aa Gym's original version, which only he has achieved among these versions.

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<sup>140</sup> Fadlou Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 115-9.

<sup>141</sup> Nugl, discussion.

<sup>142</sup> The Fikr, *Cinta Diatas Cinta*, ASC-05-19, Hikmah Records distributed by EMI Records, Compact disc, ca. 2005; Denting Hati 2, *Sabda Rosul*, Fatahillah, FBP Records, Audiocassette, ca. 2007.

### 2.5.3 “Jagalah Hati” by New MQ Voice

If Snada’s version is livelier than Aa Gym’s original, the 2006 release by the New MQ Voice is even more dynamic. [To listen to this version, refer to the attached sound file, NewMQVoice\_JagalahHati.mp3.]

Though the tempo is slightly slower than Snada’s (quarter note = 108 as opposed to 120), the addition of a small orchestra keeps the feel of the piece sharp and upbeat. The structural form follows (table 2).

**Table 2. Form of "Jagalah Hati," as performed by New MQ Voice**

A	Introduction	4 bars	solo on trumpet
B	Vocal Interlude	4 bars	vocals laid on top of instrumentals
C	Chorus	8 bars	vocals and piano alone
D	Verse 1	8 bars	
C1	Chorus	8 bars+2 –rhythm	vocals and piano, greater rhythmic variation
B1	Vocal Interlude	6 bars+2 over the musical interlude)	variation on the original vocal interlude
A1	Musical Interlude	8 bars	Musical break; Solo on Piano
D1	Verse 2	8 bars	Melodic Improvisation
C	Chorus	8 bars	strict
D2	Verse 3	8 bars	begins strict, middle section with new rhythmic variation
C2	Chorus	8 bars	melodic variation

The introduction is instrumental, as opposed to the vocal introductions provided by Snada and Aa Gym. The first four measures feature a brass section playing a counter-theme (figure 9) to

the main melody under which the piano plays an ostinato that continues throughout the song.



**Figure 9. Brass counter melody in New MQ Voice version of “Jagalah Hati”**

The next four measures take an alternative expression of the original chorus, with slightly varied lyrics (figure 10).



**Figure 10. Vocal introduction based on the themes of the chorus, lasting four measures, in the New MQ Voice version of “Jagalah Hati”**

<u>Lyrics with Variation</u>	<u>Original</u>
Jagalah, jaga, jagalah hatimu	Jagalah hati, jangan kau kotori
Janganlah biarkan kotori hatimu	Jagalah hati lentera hidup ini

<u>Original</u>	<u>Lyrics</u>
Jagalah hati, jangan kau kotori	Jagalah hati, jangan kau kotori
Jagalah hati lentera hidup ini	Jagalah hati lentera hidup ini

When the first verse (figure 11) finally begins, the listener hears a melody that is very similar to the ones by Aa Gym and Snada, but which is soon to be ornamented melodically and rhythmically altered in subsequent stanzas. The strikingly altered introduction has set the stage for things to come, as modification of the original theme is central to this version by New MQ Voice.



**Figure 11. Verse 1, “Jagalah Hati,” New MQ Voice**

No two renditions of a chorus or verse are the same, and even during a vocal interlude (figure 12), the themes of the introduction are heard and increased in length. A new line is added, which enhances the resemblance between the lyrics of the interlude and the chorus:

Jagalah hatimu, jangan kau nodai,	Guard your heart, don't disgrace it,
lentera hidup ini!	The light of this life

In this vocal interlude (figure 12), the melody of the vocal introduction (figure 10) is expanded.



**Figure 12. Vocal interlude, an eight-measure expansion of the vocal introduction, both based on the themes of the chorus, in New MQ Voice version of “Jagalah Hati”**



Every section of the piece demonstrates some sort of melodic or rhythmic variation (with the exception of the penultimate rendition of the chorus). This is best illustrated by comparing the melodic line of the first chorus (figure 13) with that of the second chorus (figure 14).



**Figure 13. First repetition of the chorus , “Jagalah Hati,” New MQ Voice**

The harmonic elements are preserved in the second chorus (figure 14) but the notes are rhythmically and melodically altered.



**Figure 14. Second repetition of the chorus, “Jagalah Hati,” New MQ Voice**

For instance, in the second chorus, the melody enters on the first beat of each measure, rather than on the pick-up note, as it did in the first version of the chorus. The second measure of each line is elongated three-fold, thereby altering the timing of the remaining phrase. This melodic and rhythmic variation also occurs between the verses as later stanzas augment the rhythms and add differing vocal harmonies.

Partly, these melodic improvisations can occur because of the static harmonic line, which contributes to freer improvisation in the melody and rhythm. The piano part provides a recurring pattern over which extemporization can take place (figure 15).



**Figure 15. Piano ostinato underlying most of "Jagalah Hati" version by New MQ voice**

In addition to the melodic additions and expansions, New MQ Voice also modifies the original lyrics, mixing and matching the halves of the verses according to their own predilection. They also add half a verse from Aa Gym's longer poem that was not included in the version by Snada.

The persistent adaptation throughout is a distinctive departure from previous versions; Aa Gym includes only slight melodic and rhythmic variation with each repetition of the chorus, and Snada's version is practically static in its duplication of the returning melodies. For example, Snada's version contains only one musical interlude that separates the first completion of all the verses from its repetition in the second half of the piece. Variation in the melodic and harmonic line is confined to the second half of the piece, and mainly consists of slight ornamentation in the melody in verse one and two, and dynamic alteration of the first repetition of the chorus. The first time the chorus is sung softly, and the second time it is repeated louder. The length of each section is consistently eight measures, except the introduction and coda which each contains four bars. In the New MQ Voice version, the length of most phrases (both in the verses and chorus) is also eight measures, but even this is confounded slightly during a musical break; the vocal and

musical interludes overlap with one another, creating a feel of six measures per section with two measures extending into the subsequent lines. Finally, the New MQ Voice version does not include a coda, but instead ends abruptly with all the voices on a major chord.

While the lead vocalist Irwan stated that he hoped to achieve a “jazz feel” in the piece,<sup>143</sup> to me, the piece seems reminiscent of a Latin dance, which I believe is created by the song’s instrumentation and the structural role those instruments perform. A counter-theme on trumpets introduces the song, which returns as an overlay above the melody later in the piece. Additionally, a steady rhythmic bass played on piano repeats as an ostinato throughout much of the song (figure 15), and the basic beat is presented on cowbell.

The fact that the piece is reminiscent of a Latin dance is noteworthy in that nasyid is certainly not a dance form. The movement of concert attendees is limited to the swaying of the upper body or head. This is true of almost all Islamic popular music genres in Indonesia, with the notable exception of the Arab-inspired *gambus*, which is often accompanied by male dance. For example, members and affiliates of Kiai Kanjeng (see chapter 4) stated that it “felt very strange” when Westerners began dancing at a performance of theirs in Australia. “It was not a bad thing,” said one member of the group and lead vocalist of the pop group Letto, “just not something we would do; it surprised us.”<sup>144</sup> His willingness not to condemn dancing at an Islamic music concert is the exception rather than the rule. Saiful Hamdi, a student of cross-cultural religious studies at the University of Gadjah Mada, stated flatly that dancing was “not allowed” (*tidak boleh*) at any type of traditional Islamic music event. When I asked if certain movements by performers could possibly constitute dance, such as choreographed walking forward and backward, during a nasyid shalawat festival on his native island of Lombok, he

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<sup>143</sup> Iman Dee (New MQ Voice), in discussion with the author, December 2006.

<sup>144</sup> Sabrang Mawa Damar Panuluh [Noe], lead singer of the band Letto, conversation with the author, July 2005.

stated that those particular movements could not be dancing, and simply repeated his prior reason; dancing was “not allowed.”<sup>145</sup> While there is no rulebook to guide concertgoers on listening etiquette, not dancing is the norm at Islamic music events.

Though dance, like music, is never explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an, historically dance has been regarded as haram, responsible for “arousing unruly passions, stimulating sensual pleasures, [and] distracting one from thoughts of God.”<sup>146</sup> Dance is often linked to verses in the Qur’an dealing with walking, which equates arrogance with a certain style of walking. “Walk not on the Earth exultantly,” proclaims Sura 17: 37; “Be modest in thy walk,” states Sura 31:18. Theologians frequently interpret these passages to mean that dancing, as an “exultant” form of walking, represents personal pride and conceit. By displaying these qualities, the believer demonstrates his independence from God and disregards His call for humility. For these reasons, theologians commonly argue that dancing is a display of immodesty and is therefore forbidden.<sup>147</sup> According to Hamdi, musical choreography for the competition was not considered to be dance, because dancing, stigmatized by sexuality and immodesty, is not considered a proper response to music. Despite what is clearly a dance rhythm beneath their churning melody,<sup>148</sup> New MQ Voice had no intention to evoke Latin dance music, and so their song helps to illustrate one way that the function of music changes in new contexts.

Taken collectively, these three versions of the song “Jagalah Hati” are indicative of the trends occurring in the nasyid genre in Indonesia over the course of a decade. At the outset, nasyid music was defined by its mostly male a cappella singing groups, emphasizing group harmony. Later artists added recorded percussion and then synthesizers to their stage

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<sup>145</sup> Saiful Hamdi, conversation with the author, August 2005.

<sup>146</sup> Charles Hirschkind, “Hearing Modernity: Egypt, Islam and the Pious Ear,” in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. by Veit Erlman (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 134.

<sup>147</sup> Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music*, 100.

<sup>148</sup> Saiful, conversation.

performances, but never appearing with an instrument themselves. Percussive effects reference Arabic music forms in Indonesia, to orient the nasyid bands as being authentic Muslims. Over time, as exhibited by New MQ Voice, the recorded instrumental accompaniments have featured Western acoustic instruments with complex musical parts, demonstrating virtuosic part writing and a defined role for instruments in the song. More recently, singers have brought acoustic instruments on stage with them during performances, beginning with Edcoustic, the two-member nasyid group from Bandung discussed earlier. The nasyid genre has evolved to the point that Islamic music producer Agus Idwar of Forte Records stated that nasyid in its present form is practically indistinguishable from Islamic rock. The only real marker of difference that he notes is in the studio production of the music, where the vocals are given greater prominence in the mixing process to emphasize the lyrics.<sup>149</sup>

In 2005, though musicians such as Opick (see chapter 1) were already recording nasyid with the aid of musical instruments (often synthesized), many nasyid fans still considered instrumentation to be haram in my discussions with them. By 2007, this viewpoint had almost entirely faded from the mainstream, at least as reflected in my interviews. I attribute this transformation to the authoritative positions of nasyid groups that used instrumental accompaniment at this time. For example, the lead singer of New MQ Voice is also the assistant director of MQ Productions, which places his band in an advantageous location for recording and studio time at Daarut Tauhiid. Similarly, the lead singer of Edcoustic is the director of the Bandung nasyid music union, an organization that aims to bring nasyid music onto major labels. Both bands serve as leaders in the nasyid community, which allows their music to establish trends in the historical evolution of nasyid. Additionally, the secular singing style of nasyid musicians allows them to be easily appreciated by a secular listening audience, and reinforces that

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<sup>149</sup> Agus Idwar, discussion.

a more secular musical style for nasyid musicians is more likely to lead to economic success in the music market. Whether or not this is ultimately desirable for the nasyid music community is a matter of personal interpretation. Whatever the case, the strategic positioning of bands such as New MQ Voice and Edcoustic partly enables the acceptance of these changing styles of nasyid within the Islamic listening community.

## 2.6 “JAGALAH HATI” AS CONTEMPORARY FOLK SONG

The frequent cover versions of this song—besides illustrating how the nasyid genre has changed over the past decade—have led nasyid writer Adjie Esa Poetra to speculate that “Jagalah Hati” has moved beyond the realm of a pop nasyid song, and in fact has become part of the *musik rakyat*, the folk music of Indonesia. In his book *Nasyid Revolution*, he writes:

Nasyid “Jagalah Hati” bahkan telah menjadi kekuatan halus yang mampu menembus batas ruang dan waktu. Lagu itu bukan hanya semakin mengokohkan seni nasyid, melainkan juga telah menjadi lagu rakyat Indonesia. [Jagalah Hati” has already become a distinguished force, capable of transcending the limits of time and space. This song has not only progressively enriched the nasyid artistic genre, moreover, it has already become a traditional folk song of Indonesia.]<sup>150</sup>

Poetra attributes this status to the song’s inclusion in what may be considered the nasyid “canon.” As nasyid includes relatively few contemporary songs in its commonly performed repertoire, the repetition of “Jagalah Hati” by many artists contributes to a sense of importance for this song. While hundreds of new compositions are written each year, the songs that are consistently covered by nasyid are those that have been sung in Indonesia for generations. In

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<sup>150</sup> Poetra, *Revolusi Nasyid*, 80.

this way, Aa Gym's song "transcends the limits of time and space,"<sup>151</sup> joining the ranks of these traditional Islamic folk songs commonly sung in pesantren, madrassas, and mosques and that have equally been subsumed and recorded by traditional and contemporary Islamic music genres, including qasidah moderen, merawis, and Islamic rock.

Not all of these songs have clear Muslim signifiers in the lyrics and are taught to children in the public school system. A classic example of this type of song is "Iilir-Iilir," discussed at greater length in chapter 4, which describes a boy climbing a starfruit tree in a field brightened by the full moon, on the eve of a wedding celebration. This is a Javanese folk song, with many stories as to its origins. The most pervasive is the trope that applies to many of these folk songs: that an Indonesian Sufi saint composed it. In the case of "Iilir-Iilir," this saint was Sunan Ampel, famous for his use of the traditional arts as a means of teaching Indonesians about Islam. Because contemporary songs are rarely subsumed into this canon of mostly older repertoire, the inclusion of "Jagalah Hati" into this shortlist, while not altogether unique, adds strength to Poetra's belief that this song has become a modern-day folk song. However, it also positions Aa Gym as a Muslim above other Indonesians and makes him equivalent to the saints of folk history.

The perception of Aa Gym as a saint is one imposed by his followers and not one that he propagates independently. Following his 2007 descent from public esteem, Aa Gym directly addressed this view, saying that at least now, the idol of himself was destroyed and he would be able to recognize his true students.<sup>152</sup> Though this statement may be seen in the context of

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.

“normative” Islam, as no man should be venerated as Allah, it also converges with al-Ghazali’s writings, that a teacher’s first task should be tear down the idol that students erect of him.<sup>153</sup>

Whether or not Aa Gym encourages a vision of his sainthood, his persona bears similarity to the contemporary Sufi saint in Egypt as analyzed by anthropologist Michael Gilsenan. In Gilsenan’s model, the Sufi saint is a charismatic leader who strives to integrate mystical understandings of Islam within “official” formulations. The saint arrives at a time of crisis and preaches a program of social change, the timeliness of which allows for his increased visibility and popularity.<sup>154</sup> Although one could read many such similarities between Aa Gym and Gilsenan’s model, the force of denial expressed by Aa Gym and the hesitation that he harbors towards acknowledging his apparent knowledge of Sufism indicate an ineffectualness in pursuing the analogy further.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter describes some of the Sufi ideologies that can be gleaned from the musical works of Aa Gym and in so doing attempts to make a case for the presence of Sufi signifiers in the musical style of nasyid. The overwhelming popularity of Aa Gym’s Islamic products (especially prior to 2007) indicates that these philosophies are celebrated and valued in Indonesia. However, as demonstrated in the versions of “Jagalah Hati” by the Snada and New MQ Voice, the “Sufi” aspects of the song are downplayed in most subsequent versions. Munsyid are clearly intrigued by the musical compositions of Aa Gym as evidenced by the repeated reproduction of “Jagalah Hati,” but Aa Gym’s treatment of the song is uniquely meditative.

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<sup>153</sup> Fadiman and Frager, *Essential Sufism*, 62.

<sup>154</sup> el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology,” 238.



Aa Gym's music is in part successful because of his ability to balance the demand for Sufi spirituality without overtly drawing attention to these insights in his official rhetoric. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, tenets of Sufism endured a decline due to the dual rise of modernist and reformist Islam. Modernists rejected Sufi Islam because it seemed to represent Islam as a backwards religion, accentuating esotericism, asceticism, and an archaic education system which deemphasized critical and free thought. Islamic Reformists equally rejected Sufism, as it contravened the exoteric aspects of Islam such as strict monotheism and Islamic law, which were seemingly abandoned in favor of individual experience and spiritual transformation. Howell maintains that the rise and sustenance of both of these movements allowed scholars to portray the recent Islamic revival in Indonesia as being "scripturalist," or to use Waardenburg's term, "normative," that is rejecting Sufi traditions in favor of those firmly derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna, a portrayal that she believes is misleading.<sup>155</sup>

In his formal rhetoric, Aa Gym neither refutes or accepts Sufism as a possible path of Islam, saying only that he does not study Sufism, nor does he understand ideas about "New Sufism."<sup>156</sup> This obvious obfuscation is surprising when one considers his routine quotations of recognized Sufi authorities, such as al-Ghazali and Jalaluddin Rumi.<sup>157</sup> Like these Sufi masters, his own discourse stresses the personal piety and experience of the individual in a manner not unlike asceticism. In his writing he says, "Uruslah diri sendiri sebelum mengurus orang lain. Perbaikilah diri sendiri sebelum memperbaiki orang lain. Bersihkanlah diri sendeiri sebelum membersihkan orang lain." (Take care of yourself before you try to take care of other people. Make yourself better, before you try to improve other people. Cleanse yourself, before you try to

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<sup>155</sup> Howell, "Sufism," 702.

<sup>156</sup> "Sebetulnya saya tidak belajar tentang tarekat, tidak memperdalam tentang Sufistik... I've heard about New Sufism, but I don't understand a lot about that." Aa Gym, discussion.

<sup>157</sup> Evidenced especially in his book *Jagalah Hati*.

purify others).”<sup>158</sup> Though Aa Gym cannot be accurately described as a Sufi, it is reasonable to assess his teachings as containing elements of Sufi spirituality. Musically, while some of these aspects are lost as bands transform his songs to their likings, the lyrics still retain a power resonant with Sufi ideology. To nasyid artists, Aa Gym functions as a guide, leading followers on a course of Islam.

Through 2007, Aa Gym has been able to cater to both the unspoken need for Sufi spirituality to respond to an era of economic, political and religious crisis, and the vocal uproar of anti-Sufism that pervaded much of the last century,<sup>159</sup> by divorcing his practice from his rhetoric. As he embarks on a new phase of Islamic teaching since his 2007 fall from celebrity status, it will be interesting to note if his rhetoric in both his orations and his music becomes more conservative. As Sufi spirituality is often associated with popular Islam,<sup>160</sup> it seems likely that these elements face expunction. While nasyid artists had already begun finding alternative modes of promotion set in motion just before the decline of Aa Gym’s MQ conglomerate, as in the development of nasyid unions in Bandung and Jakarta, it is probable that the veiled presence of Sufism in Indonesian nasyid is less likely to deviate. However, given the ideological positioning of nasyid artists, these Sufi elements are also equally unlikely to made more apparent.

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<sup>158</sup> Gymanstiar, *Jagalah Hati*, 10.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth Sirreyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999).

<sup>160</sup> Patrick D. Gaffney, “Popular Islam,” *The Annals of the American Academy* 524 (November 1992): 38.

### 3.0 ISLAMIC ROCK, AHMAD DHANI AND DEWA 19

In 2006, Indonesian rock star Ahmad Dhani received a standing ovation for a speech he delivered before top US government and military leaders at the National Homeland Defense Conference, an event that coincided with his band Dewa 19's first American tour.<sup>161</sup> In his speech, he shared his understandings of how to overcome what he identified as the global problem of religious hatred, noting that "building up values of tolerance is critical in Indonesia and the Muslim world in order to defeat terrorism."<sup>162</sup> In his words, the problem of radical Islam "can be solved by helping Muslims to understand the essence of Islam itself in the form of Sufism." Though Dhani is a rock star, not a theologian, he defines Sufism as "the inner, spiritual dimension of Islam that focuses not on what separates people from one another or God; but rather, on what unites us."<sup>163</sup> The words that he uses to describe his religious philosophy include "moderate," "mystical," and "pluralist." When prompted, he accepts that the teachings of Sufi mystics—including the mythical *wali sanga*, the nine saints responsible for the conversion of Indonesia to Islam—are true.<sup>164</sup> His particular declarations of Sufism, which are reaffirmed in his music lyrics, have led many radical Muslims to liken Dhani with the Medieval Persian mystic Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922 CE), one of Islam's most famous martyrs.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Adib Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak Ahmad Dhani," *Rolling Stone* (July 2007), 46.

<sup>162</sup> Rebecca U. Cho, "Rock Star Rattles Radical Islam," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2006.

<sup>163</sup> Ahmad Dhani, "Keynote Address by Muslim Rock Star," National Homeland Defense Symposium, Colorado, 2006. <http://www.LibForAll.org/programs-educational-campaign.html> (accessed November 1, 2008).

<sup>164</sup> "[Saya] percaya bahwa mereka benar." Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak," 42.

<sup>165</sup> Mujtaba Hamdi and Imam Shofwan, "Ada al-Hallaj di Balik Dhani Ahmad," *Syir'ah* 43 (June 2004).

Executed in Baghdad for what the Abbasid Dynasty considered to be dangerous teachings, al-Hallaj preached an earthly unification with the divine and a mystic universalism that appeared to diminish the ruling power's religious authority in favor of individual experience. He is famously quoted as saying "Ana al-Haqq" meaning "I am the Truth," or "I am God." He differed from his Sufi contemporaries through his attempts to popularize Sufi principles to the masses, removing the lengthy stages of learning in which a believer must participate for knowledge, and which, for the non-Sufi, appeared to be shrouded in secrecy. The comparison between Ahmad Dhani and al-Hallaj is one that appeals to Dhani, and he does not oppose it. When asked whether he felt as if al-Hallaj lived within him, which was the title question of an article written in the Indonesian magazine, *Syir'ah*, he responded, "You can say my way of mystical understanding, or path, is the way of al-Hallaj and others...Syekh Siti Jenar." Though he is "also a fan of al-Hallaj" (Saya juga penggemar al-Hallaj),<sup>166</sup> Dhani connects his philosophies with those of the Indonesian saint Syekh Siti Jenar, who was similarly martyred for beliefs, especially that of "spiritual popularism."<sup>167</sup> In so doing, he offers equal legitimacy to Indonesian mystical Islam, and places Indonesian saints on an equal footing with their Middle Eastern theological counterparts.

This chapter examines Ahmad Dhani's musical strategies for peacemaking through his interpretations and disseminations of Sufi Islam, particularly those of al-Hallaj and Syekh Siti Jenar. As former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid and C. Holland Taylor (of an American non-governmental organization that "promote[s] a pluralistic and tolerant understanding of Islam") write together in an article for *The Washington Post*: "Dhani and his group [Dewa 19] are on the front lines of a global conflict, defending Islam from its fanatical

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<sup>166</sup> Hamdi and Shofwan, "Ada al-Hallaj."

<sup>167</sup> Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 123.

hijackers. In a world all too often marred by hatred and violence committed in the name of religion, they seek to rescue an entire generation from Wahhabi-financed extremists whose goal is to transform Muslim youth into holy warriors and suicide bombers.”<sup>168</sup> This is a battleground fought on musical territory, with the dual weapons of commercial rock and Sufi Islam. Through a close examination of Dhani’s music, I argue that it is Dhani’s ability to synthesize contrasting religious perspectives that allows his message of unification through the promotion of inner spirituality to emerge effectively.

### 3.1 DHANI’S SECULAR MUSIC CAREER

Before 2002, Dhani was much like any other secular rock artist with the exception of his immediate and remarkable success. That Dhani was not at all interested in writing religious-themed music is made evident by the very name of his rock band. Literally, Dewa means God in Indonesian, not the one Almighty God of a monotheistic tradition but rather one god of many deities in a pantheon. The name originated from the first letters of the founding members of the band (**D**hani, **E**rwin, **W**awan and **A**ndre),<sup>169</sup> but without knowledge of this trivia, it seems hardly possible to disassociate the band’s name from the word for the god of a polytheist tradition. Recalling the criticism that the band Edcooustic faced with their Japanese song “Kamisama” (see chapter 2), with such a name for the band, any of Dewa 19’s successes in the Islamic music market are remarkable.

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<sup>168</sup> Wahid Abdurrahman and C. Holland Taylor, “In Indonesia, Songs against Terrorism,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 2005.

<sup>169</sup> The number 19 comes from the ages of the bandmembers at the time the band was formed; each was nineteen years old. However, for a brief time (between 2000 and 2004) the number 19 was dropped, and the band was simply named Dewa. Both Dewa and Dewa 19 are used interchangeably by fans and bandmembers.

As a secular musician, Dhani was famous by the age of eighteen. By 2000 his fifth album, *Bintang Lima*, sold two million copies in its first year, no small feat given Indonesia's vigorous pirating trade. When taking into account illegal vending, the estimated number of sales is approximately ten million copies, meaning that one in ten Indonesians possibly owned a copy of the album.<sup>170</sup> Dewa 19's early albums dealt strictly with secular themes of love and romance. Though Dhani has experimented with political subjects with a subsidiary rock group, the Ahmad Band, Dhani says that he finds the composition process very difficult, and almost impossible if he wants to retain artistic integrity. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, he commented:

Gue nggak bisa berbicara dalam lagu itu dengan tema politik. Kalau dalam tulisan bisa. Gue belum bisa menemukan titik temu antara artistik dan politik bisa menyatu indah. Gue bisa saja bikin lagu soal politik tapi nanti tidak bisa artistik. Hanya sekedar lagu. Gue tidak bisa membuat lagu begitu saja meninggalkan artinya...itu susah banget. Susah sekali.  
[I can't use a song to speak about politics...I haven't been able to find a meeting point between art and politics, or how they can unite to create something beautiful. I can write a song about a particular political problem but then its never artistic...just a song. It's extremely difficult. Very difficult.]<sup>171</sup>

Whether because of their artistic merits or not, the Ahmad Band never superseded Dhani's primary band Dewa 19 in popularity. In the Ahmad Band's political criticisms, such as in the song "Distorsi" from the 1998 album *Ideologi, Sikap, Otak* (Ideology, Attitude, Intelligence), their language is scathing, but never directly implicates those responsible for the political situations the band criticizes, nor do they offer any guidance in creating solutions to those problems. In "Distorsi," Dhani writes of the political climate during the last years of the Suharto regime:

Maunya selalu  
memberantas kemiskinan  
tapi ada yang selalu  
kuras uang rakyat

They always want  
To combat poverty  
But there is always someone who  
Siphons the people's money

<sup>170</sup> C. Holland Taylor (director, LibForAll Foundation), in discussion with the author, July 2007.

<sup>171</sup> Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak," 42.

ada yang sok aksi  
buka mulut PROTAS PROTES  
tapi sayang mulutnya  
selalu beraroma alkohol

There are show-offs  
Who open their mouths in protest  
But it's a shame their mouths  
always smell of alcohol

yang muda mabuk,  
yang tua korup  
mabuk terus, korup terus  
jayalah negeri ini,  
jayalah negeri ini,  
maunya selalu  
menegakkan keadilan  
tapi masih saja ada  
sis a hukum rimba

the youth are drunk,  
the elders corrupt  
continually drunk, continually corrupt  
great is this country,  
great is this country,  
they always want  
to strengthen justice  
but there is still  
the residue of the law of the jungle.<sup>172</sup>

Following an examination of this and other songs, R. Anderson Sutton observes that while this style of rock music aims to contribute “meaningful and lasting change, constituting potential sites for the construction of meaning resistant to Indonesia’s status quo on political, social, environmental, and moral fronts,” it does not play a critical role in creating social change in Indonesia either because of censorship by the government or in the marketplace.<sup>173</sup> Sutton discerns that many Indonesians do not see this protest music as helping in alleviating political crisis, which prompted the folk artist most famous for producing Indonesian protest music, Iwan Fals, to announce in the year 2000 that “in the interest of promoting peace and harmony, he would devote his new song-writing efforts to love songs, rather than political protest.”<sup>174</sup> In the same year, Dhani’s music also shifted once more to themes of love.

Dhani is famous for his skillful manipulation of the Indonesian press. The print and television media often denounce him for being arrogant,<sup>175</sup> for his sharp criticism of other bands, and for his alleged affair with a member of his wife’s band, Ratu. Dhani redirects this negative

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<sup>172</sup> R. Anderson Sutton, “Reform Art?: Performance Live and Mediated in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” *Ethnomusicology* 49, no. 2 (2004), 220-21 (translations his).

<sup>173</sup> Sutton, “Reform Art,” 26.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>175</sup> Evidenced, for example, in the cover of the Indonesian edition of *Rolling Stone*, which stated as a tag line for the article, “Behind the Arrogance of Ahmad Dhani” (Di Balik Arogansi Ahmad Dhani). Adib Hidayat, “Ideology, Sikap dan Otak Ahmad Dhani,” front cover.

attention in unique and often scandalous ways, such as allegedly sending a letter to the wives of two Indonesian presidents to defend his marital actions with his celebrity wife Maya Estianty.<sup>176</sup> These types of actions keep Dhani's name in the media and play a large role in his commercial success. As his fans negotiate between an abhorrence of the media portrayal of his character and an attraction towards his music, following Dhani's antics sometimes seems like a national pastime. However, these negative visions store destructive potential for Dhani as a remitter of Sufi teachings, for a Sufi must practice what he or she preaches; to do otherwise is insincere.<sup>177</sup>

### 3.2 DHANI'S SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Dhani's transition from a purely secular musical output towards writing spiritual themes was gradual rather than revelatory. Though Dhani came from a religious family, he distanced himself from their philosophies at a young age, referring to his parents' ideologies as "radical" and "hard-line Islam."<sup>178</sup> The religious extremism that he describes derives from his paternal line. His father was an official of the Wahhabi influenced organization, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII), well known for its efforts to establish a formal bond between Islam and Indonesian politics. His grandfather was a member of Darul Islam, a jihadist organization that declared as its enemies first the Dutch colonials, and secondly the secularist Indonesian

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<sup>176</sup> Kapan Lagi, "Ahmad Dhani Tulis Surat ke Istri SBY dan Gus Dur," April 28, 2007, <http://m.kapanlagi.com/musik/berita/ahmad-dhani-tulis-surat-ke-istri-sby-dan-gus-dur-vxgg0km-1.html> (accessed October 30, 2008).

<sup>177</sup> James Fadiman and Robert Frager, *Essential Sufism*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 24.

<sup>178</sup> "Kalau keluarga memang dari Islam garis keras. Islam radikal." Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak," 42.



leaders who rejected the creation of an Islamic state.<sup>179</sup> Many members of Darul Islam later joined contemporary terrorist groups, most notably Jemaah Islamiyah, which professes to close relations with international terrorist organizations including Al-Qaida,<sup>180</sup> and members of which were responsible for the bombings in Bali that left over two hundred dead in 2002.

Beginning in 1994, Dhani began actively meeting with religious leaders when visiting different cities tours while on tour with the band Dewa 19, in an effort to discover more about an Islam that did not share these radical tendencies. In 2000, he met a religious teacher, Bang Faiz,<sup>181</sup> with whom Dhani felt an immediate kinship.<sup>182</sup> In addition to an instinctive spiritual sense, Faiz was educated at the Javanese pesantren Gontor,<sup>183</sup> and is a descendant of the Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1077–1166), the founder of the Sufi order Qadiri.<sup>184</sup> Jilani traced his heritage to the prophet Muhammad from both his mother and father, and by sharing in this lineage, Faiz establishes his legitimacy as a Sufi teacher. Either through one's ancestry or teaching tradition, a connection to the prophet Muhammad is called a *silsila*, or an unbroken conduit through which blessings flow from Islam's source to the contemporary pupil.<sup>185</sup> As their relationship deepened, Dhani accepted Bang Faiz as his teacher, and for a period of time began focusing his musical efforts on expressing his newfound spirituality.

Dhani's account of finding a teacher is akin to a rite of passage in the Sufi tradition, signifying his transition from secular wandering to being placed on the Sufi path. The Arabic word for this path, *tariqah*, is often used synonymously with the word Sufism; its meaning

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<sup>179</sup> Mary Kissel, "This Muslim Rocker Preaches Tolerance to a Strong Drumbeat," *Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 2006.

<sup>180</sup> Giora Eliraz, *Islam in Indonesia: Modernism, Radicalism, and the Middle East Dimension* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>181</sup> Bang is a common form of address meaning older brother.

<sup>182</sup> Ahmad Dhani, conversation with the author, July 2007.

<sup>183</sup> This is the same facility attended by Cak Nun, discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>184</sup> Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak," 43.

<sup>185</sup> Fadiman and Frager, *Essential Sufism*, 24-5.

implies more than just a road, but an unmarked passage that leads to an oasis through a barren desert. Because the winds constantly shift the desert sands, only the most experienced guide can direct others on the journey and any unlucky traveler without such a guide would likely perish.<sup>186</sup> Given this definition of the word “path,” the significance of Dhani’s announcement that he had found a Sufi teacher is that it demonstrates that he was willing to place his trust and faith in Faiz as an important means of understanding Islam and knowing the Divine. Though Dhani had learned the basics of Sufism before, even naming his children after celebrated masters of the tradition,<sup>187</sup> pronouncing a student-teacher relationship with Faiz represents the beginning of his journey in mysticism.

This manner of actively seeking Islamic experts to gain knowledge is commonplace in Indonesia. It is especially usual for those not formally educated in an Islamic tradition, as a documented journey to find a teacher may serve to validate their later expertise as religious authorities. This narrative is particularly familiar to consumers of popular music, as music artists often redirect their popularity to imprint spiritual messages upon their audiences. One of the most well known examples is that of the Indonesian rock legend Gito Rollies (1947-2008), who had acquired a reputation for becoming intoxicated during performances and for betraying confidences during his career in the 1980s.<sup>188</sup> In the last decade of his life, after seeking spiritual guidance from Islamic teachers throughout Southeast Asia, but especially Indonesia, he became a highly respected authority of Islam, inspiring many people to travel and learn from him. This transition from an undisciplined and immoderate lifestyle to asceticism is indicative of Benedict Anderson’s heterodox model of power in Java, in which power becomes concentrated only after the ritual exhaustion of vice and worldly passions. The extreme manner in which decadences are

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>187</sup> Kissel, “Muslim Rocker.”

<sup>188</sup> Gito Rollies, in discussion with the author, July 2007.

first concentrated, depleted and then expunged allows the seeker to achieve a spiritual profundity equivalent to those that had sought spiritual power in more conventional ways.<sup>189</sup> The similarity in stories between Dhani and Gito, in their transition from rock star to religious leader, demonstrates that Dhani is by no means unique and indicates that his exceptionalism derives from the politicized element to his music composition.

### 3.3 DEFINING GENRES: ISLAMIC ROCK

Because Dhani's spiritual compositions are presented discreetly and on an equal basis with his secular works, stylistically I position these pieces within the subgenre of contemporary Islamic music that I refer to as Islamic rock. Songs in this category characterize both an ideological and musical shift that differs from both nasyid and Islamic fusion. These songwriters, who are invariably rock musicians first and Islamic writers second, tend not to re-classify their Islamic works as separate from their secular repertoire, stating that they are "just rock songs" that also happened to be appropriate for Muslim contexts.<sup>190</sup> It differs from nasyid, because of the artist's intention; when asked if it could be considered nasyid, Sam, the lead singer of the rock band Bimbo, stated, "Definitely not. This is just rock" (*Sangat tidak. Ini rock saja*).<sup>191</sup> As Islamic rock is so loosely defined both by artists and music distributors, in this section I attempt to isolate and identify the characteristics that cause this subgenre to be unique. The indicators that I describe include: instrumentation, musical form, lyrics, the artist's intention, and consideration of the work within the scope of the artist's repertoire.

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<sup>189</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Jakarta: First Equinox Edition, 2006), 25.

<sup>190</sup> Muhammad Samsudin Hardjakusumah [Sam], (singer, Bimbo), in discussion with the author, July 2005.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

Musically, Islamic rock is indistinguishable from secular Indonesian rock music. The ensemble usually contains a core instrumentation that is electronically amplified, consisting of electric bass, electric guitar, synthesizer, and drums. The song structure is again identical with secular rock. Most songs are strophic, alternating between a changing verse and a static chorus, and often containing an instrumental break for musical solos on guitar or bass.

The lyrics must resonate with values commonly held in Indonesian Islam, but do not necessarily have to contain Muslim signifiers. For example, the song considered foundational in the subgenre is the 1974 hit “Tuhan” (God), written by the band Bimbo. The songwriter, Sam Bimbo, described his inspiration after admiring the way that a common knowledge of hymns seemed to unite Christians of all denominations throughout the world, especially during the Christmas season. His vision was to create a composition resembling “Silent Night,” which would similarly unite all Muslims when they heard it and sang it together.<sup>192</sup> However, what is interesting about his lyric choice, and is indicative about the Islamic rock subgenre in general, is that the song is devoid of Muslim signifiers. The lyrics read:

Tuhan	God
Tempat aku berteduh	Place of refuge
Dimana aku mengeluh	Where I sigh
Dengan segala peluh	With every perspiration
Tuhan	God
Tuhan Yang Maha Esa	God who is the one and only
Dimana aku memuja	Wherever I worship
Dengan segala do'a	With all my prayers
Aku jauh, engkau jauh	I am far, you are far
Aku dekat, engkau dekat	I am close, you are close
Hati adalah cermin	The heart is a mirror
Tempat pahala <sup>193</sup> dosa berpadu	The place where reward and sin unite

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> While “pahala” is usually specific to Islam, I recall many conversations with Indonesian Christians who used the term to refer to Christ’s promise of reward in heaven.

Tuhan	God
Tempat aku berteduh	Place of refuge
Dimana aku mengeluh	Where I sigh
Dengan segala peluh	With every perspiration <sup>194</sup>

This song is Muslim only because the author declares it so, and because it does not contradict any commonly held Islamic beliefs. However, it could just as easily be claimed by any other religion in Indonesia, as even the word that Sam uses for God is the Sanskrit “Tuhan” rather than the Arabic “Allah.”

The Islamic rock musician is first and foremost a secular artist but for whatever reason has released one or more religious albums. Most often, these songs or albums are strategically released before the holy month of Ramadan as a calculated attempt to exploit religious markets and increase sales. As often as not, these musicians are quite open about their tactics; Makki, the bass player of the critically acclaimed and usually secular rock group Ungu, stated in response to such a criticism, “We’re not the only ones doing it...we’re just the most successful at it.”<sup>195</sup> Ungu’s hit song “Andai Ku Tahu” (If I Knew) from their album *Surgamu* (Your Heaven) won multiple awards in 2007 for best video, best religious album, and best song. In formal interviews after the release of this album, the artists cleaned up their images as Muslims, saying that they no longer drank as much as previously, nor did they use drugs. However like Bimbo, they distanced themselves from nasyid, which they deemed too limiting as a genre, stating that they were rock artists, and the genre they were writing in was clearly rock.<sup>196</sup> In their photo shoots, band members alter between self-consciously artistic and more conservative pictures. Doing so demonstrates another way that Islamic rock differs from other contemporary Islamic subgenres, as most fans seem quick to forgive the rock musician’s irreligious shortcomings, and instead

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<sup>194</sup> Originally released in 1974, it is also found on the compact disc *Qasidah Bimbo*, CI - 57, PT Arga Swara Kencana Musik, 1998. My translation.

<sup>195</sup> Makki Omar Parikesit (musician, Ungu), in discussion with the author, May 2007.

<sup>196</sup> Pasha [Sigit Purnomo Syamsuddin Said] (singer, Ungu), in discussion with the author, May 2007.

seem content for them to confess any affiliation with Islam, even if only one month out of the year.

However, increasing sales is not the only reason for Islamic rock artists to traverse beyond their secular borders. As in the case of Dhani, they may be challenged to present an alternate ideological view that is counter to one presented in the mainstream. This is particularly true of the band Gigi, who felt inspired to replicate their experiences growing up to the hit Islamic songs of Bimbo. In 2002, they created an Islamic rock album with the goal of making Islam fashionable again for young people.<sup>197</sup> By choosing and reinterpreting songs that they found personally meaningful as young Indonesian Muslims, the members of Gigi help to make popular many of these older songs for contemporary youth. After releasing two religious albums, Gigi returned to writing secular songs, performing their religious works within their regular concert tours, as well as organizing specifically religious tours during Ramadan.<sup>198</sup>

Song themes are generally compatible with the band's identity both as secular musicians and as members of the Muslim faith, usually discussing love or religious beliefs of the individual. Ungu's "Andai Ku Tahu," discussed above, fits this latter model, exposing the singer's fears of judgment in the afterlife.

Andai ku tahu	If I knew
Kapan tiba ajalku	When my hour of death arrives
Ku akan memohon	I would ask
Tuhan tolong panjangkan umurku	God to please extend my years.
Andai ku tahu	If I knew
Kapan tiba masaku	When my time will end
Ku akan memohon	I would ask
Tuhan jangan Kau ambil nyawaku	God not to take my life.
Andai ku tahu	And if I knew
MalaikatMu kan menjemputku	Your Angel was coming for me,
Izinkan aku	Permit me
Mengucap kata tobat padaMu	To say the words of repentance to You.

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<sup>197</sup> Armand Maulana (lead singer, Gigi), in discussion with the author, July 2007.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

Aku takut	I am frightened
Akan semua dosa dosaku	That all my sins will...
Aku takut	I am frightened
Dosa yang terus membayangiku	My sins continually overshadow me.
Ampuni aku, dari segala dosa dosaku	Forgive me from all my sins
Ampuni aku,	Forgive me,
Menangisku bertobat padaMu	I repent my sins to you.
Aku manusia yang takut neraka	I am human, frightened of hell
Namun aku juga, tak pantas di surga	But also undeserving of heaven.

Apart from an expressing a general religious sense, the song does not explicitly address a Muslim audience, but rather a more universal sense of atonement for past sins. By focusing on universal themes of love and the individual, Islamic rock songs can be interpreted on multiple levels, simultaneously functioning as both religious and secular.

One of the unintended consequences of the poly-interpretability of Islamic rock songs is that, very often, secular bands that maintain traditional moral values in their dealings with the Indonesian media are frequently reclassified as belonging to the subgenre Islamic rock. The most cited of these songs during my interactions with Indonesians was the poetic love song, “Ruang Rindu,” (the Space of Longing) sung by the group Letto. The lyrics are utterly devoid of any specifically Islamic indicators, stating:

Di daun yang ikut mengalir lembut	The leaf joins the gentle flow
Terbawa sungai ke hujung mata	Swept by the river to the horizon
Dan aku mulai takut terbawa cinta	And I become scared, swept along by love
Menghirup rindu	Breathing in the longing
yang sesakkan dada	That suffocates me
Jalanku hampa dan kusentuh dia	My path was empty, and I touched him/her <sup>199</sup>
Terasa hangat oh didalam hati	Warmth filled my heart
Kupegang erat dan kuhalangi waktu	I clung on tightly, trying to still the time
Tak urung jua kulihatnya pergi	But failing, I watched him/her leave.

Tak pernah kuragu dan slalu kuingat I never doubted, and always I remember

<sup>199</sup> Pronouns in Indonesian are gender neutral, therefore I translate “dia” as him/her.

Kerlingan matamu	The glance of your eyes
dan sentuhan hangat	And the warm caress
Ku saat itu mencari makna	In that moment, I searched for meaning
Tumbuhkan rasa yg sesakkan dada	Intensifying the feelings of drowning.

Kau datang dan pergi oh begitu saja	You came and went, just like that
Semua kuterima apa adanya	I receive it all, whatever happens,
Mata terpejam dan hati menggumam	With eyes closed and heart whispering,
Di ruang rindu kita bertemu	In the space of longing, we meet.

The song begins with a common poetic format called *pantun*, characterized by beginning the tale with two unrelated couplets illustrating a scene in nature. In this case, he likens a leaf being swept along by a current, to the feeling of being carried along by love. The lyrics and the accompanying music video use this imagery to relate a tale of lost love. The song describes a person whose path was empty before finding love, and how the loss of that love brings the singer on a search for meaning. It resonates with Islamic values, when the singer decides to receive joys and misfortunes with equal acceptance.

When I confronted the songwriter, Sabrang (Noe), with the assumption by many of his fans that “Ruang Rindu” was intended as a spiritual song, he expressed surprise at this interpretation.<sup>200</sup> Perhaps this classification as an Islamic-rock song is in part a consequence of the band’s close relationship with the religious leader Cak Nun, as the songwriter is his eldest son and each of the band members reached adulthood living within his spiritual community. Independent of their affiliation with Cak Nun, however, the band’s moral image (cultivated by their conscious avoidance of rumors in the press) and contemplative song lyrics place their work on an equivalent plane with other Islamic rock songs. This compatibility allows fans to view “Ruang Rindu” as being within the genre of religious rock, even if composing that type of song was not the band’s intention.

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<sup>200</sup> Sabrang Mawa Damar Panuluh [Noe], conversation with the author, July 2007.



Musically and ideologically, artists writing in this style must negotiate between two identities: that of secular rock music as they reproduce Western performance traditions and the accompanying preconceived notions of Western morality, and that of Indonesian Islam, grounded in more traditionally conservative ethics. Both lifestyles seem to be foundationally at odds with one another. Navigating around this basic contradiction to credibly dwell in both realms is one of the fundamental tasks of the Islamic rock musician. Part of the reason why the subgenre is never strictly defined is that band members do not want to lose authenticity as rock musicians, which functions as their primary identity.

### 3.4 EARLY RELIGIOUS ENDEAVORS

Dewa 19's first spiritual album was actually their fifth recorded album and was produced in 2000. Named *Bintang Lima* (Five Stars), it attempted to infuse Dewa 19's songs with themes of the divine (*ketuhanan*).<sup>201</sup> While it is evident from the song titles (see figure 16) that the band was indeed struggling with ideas of love, it was less clear for their fans that they were considering themes of mystical love.

<b>Song Title</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Mukadimah	Prologue	0:50
Roman Picisan	Dime Novel	4:03
Dua Sejoli	Two of a Kind	5:24
Risalah Cinta	Love Tale	4:53
Separuh Nafas	Half Breaths	5:01
Cemburu	Jealous	3:07
Hidup Adalah Perjuangan	Life is a Struggle	3:27
Lagu Cinta	Love Song	4:27

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<sup>201</sup> Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak," 46.

Cinta Adalah Misteri	Love is a Mystery	5:07
Sayap-sayap Patah	Broken Wings	4:19
1000 Bintang	1000 Stars	0:54

**Figure 16. Song titles for the Dewa 19 album *Bintang Lima***

It is possible to interpret these songs in terms of Islamic mysticism, but unless the listener were undergoing a similar spiritual journey, it is more likely that these songs would be interpreted as secular love songs. Many were recorded again in the band's ninth album *Kerajaan Cinta* (Kingdom of Love), produced in 2007, to reflect the band's new singer, Once,<sup>202</sup> who only began singing with the group during their sixth album. Because Dewa 19's music had already gained a reputation for being Islamic, perhaps this re-recording indicates that Dhani is interested in supporting his position that the songs are indeed religiously inspired works, a fact which he often raises during interviews. This particularly seems likely in his re-recording of the fifth song on the album, "Separuh Nafas," which was doubly covered, the second time in English. In this latter version, the line "Oh, Dewiku," which is intoned in the refrain, Dhani translates in English as "I worship you"; this represents a departure from its original meaning, as a more literal translation might read, "Oh, my goddess."

The general public did not recognize the original versions of these songs as being particularly spiritual; in fact in an otherwise favorable concert review, a journalist for *The Jakarta Post* wrote about *Bintang Lima*, "Ten years have gone by and the group remains faithful to its 'old recipe:' belting out love songs."<sup>203</sup> However, many individuals did recognize a spiritual value in the lyrics. For example, lead singer Giring of the hit rock band Nidji stated that the album *Bintang Lima* was particularly inspirational for him personally, both musically and

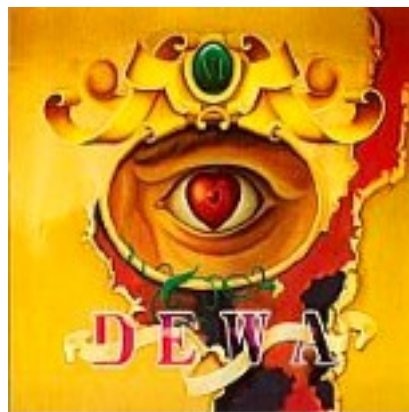
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<sup>202</sup> Pronounced "ohn-che."

<sup>203</sup> Primastuti Handayani, "Dewa Delights Loyal Fans in Concert," *Jakarta Post*, February 16, 2002.

spiritually. Giring later traveled to meet with Dhani's teacher in East Java.<sup>204</sup> Whatever its reception, *Bintang Lima* was an instant success, becoming a multi-platinum seller for the band.

After Dhani announced that he was studying with a Sufi teacher, beginning with the album *Cintailah Cinta* (Loving Love), produced in 2002, his music was more widely recognized as containing spiritual elements, though not yet always. In lamenting the musical output by Indonesian bands, one music reviewer, Hera Diani, wrote that "Dewa could only come up with a highly pretentious sixth album entitled *Cintailah Cinta* (Loving Love), which lacks in any defining character."<sup>205</sup> However, a closer look reveals that the album's "defining character" was in fact Dhani's developing interest in Sufism, and that it functions almost as an exercise in working out these themes alongside secular motifs, much like a rock "concept album." Part of this was brought about by Faiz's active role in *Cintailah Cinta*, as he directly influenced Dhani's creative process, including designing the cover artwork of the album. The design, depicting a heart in the iris of an eye, symbolizes the gaze of the believer with the love of the divine, and is one of the first recognizable emergences of the heart in a spiritual sense in Dhani's works.<sup>206</sup>



**Figure 17. Cover art for Dewa 19's sixth album, *Cintailah Cinta***

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<sup>204</sup> Giring Ganesha (singer, Nidji), conversation with the author, July 2007.

<sup>205</sup> Hera Diani, "Local Music Scene Lacks Creativity, Variety," *The Jakarta Post*, December 28, 2002.

<sup>206</sup> Taylor, discussion.

Like *Bintang Lima*, the songs of *Cintailah Cinta* were composed of poly-interpretable language, exercising themes of a common humanity united by love as evidenced in the song titles (See figure 18).

<b>Song Title</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Arjuna [Mencari Cinta] <sup>207</sup>	Arjuna [Searches for Love]	5:14
Cintailah Cinta	Loving Love	5:14
Kasidah Cinta	Hymn of Love <sup>208</sup>	4:23
Kosong	Empty	3:35
Bukan Rahasia	No Secret	4:31
Angin	Wind	4:11
Pupus	Gone	5:05
Air Mata	Tears	7:34
Mistikus Cinta	Mystical Love	5:38

**Figure 18. Song titles for the Dewa 19 album *Cintailah Cinta***

The songs closely follow the compositional techniques common in Islamic rock pieces, and the themes talk about both love—which can be interpreted as both spiritual and banal—and the individual. Like Bimbo’s “Tuhan,” the song lyrics do not indicate any affiliation with Islam specifically, and moreover avoid any real suggestion of religion, failing to mention even “God” or “heaven.” On one hand, the content seems strictly about mankind; however when alternatively viewed, Dhani follows the poetic tradition of Sufi writers, faithfully constructing the philosophies of those mystics that he professes to follow.<sup>209</sup>

Much of Dhani’s poetry follows the philosophic principles of al-Hallaj. While most of Hallaj’s writings were destroyed after his execution, some of them survive to elucidate his

<sup>207</sup> Although the original title of this song was “Arjuna Mencari Cinta,” a copyright scandal emerged initiated by the journalist Yudhistira A.M Massardi, author of a novel with the same title. Dhani agreed to change the name to simply “Arjuna.”

<sup>208</sup> Kasidah, often spelled “qasidah,” is a word derived from the Arabic poetic form of the same name that predates Islam, which deals with themes of love and longing. In Indonesia, it has also become a song form, consisting of chant in Arabic accompanied by the frame drum *rebana*, often sung in pesantren, especially by women. Therefore, the translation might easily be Love Chant, Love Poem, or Love Prayer; I chose hymn, although I recognize that this term has strong Christian overtones.

<sup>209</sup> Hidayat, “Ideology, Sikap dan Otak,” 46.

philosophies. In one of the most famous quotes in Sufi literature, he states, "I have become the One I love, and the One I love has become me! We are two spirits infused in a (single) body."<sup>210</sup> The principle he is speaking of is called *tauhid*, and refers the desired unity between God, often called the Divine, or the Beloved, and man, who is the lover or seeker. Al-Hallaj's choice of language, of two spirits fusing into one body, led many critics in his time to refute the worldly terms with which he describe this mystical union, and was ultimately one of the reasons he was executed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. His biographer Massignon, describes this consummation of love as: "the amorous nuptial in which the Creator ultimately rejoins his creature."<sup>211</sup> Though al-Hallaj has been criticized for obfuscating the theology of tauhid with profane allusions, none of his surviving poetry contains imagery that can be construed as erotic. The Sufi scholar Annemarie Schimmel asserts that though al-Hallaj describes a "tender and intense expression of mystical yearning," his "language is chaste."<sup>212</sup>

Later Sufi poets were more overtly sensual. None is more famous for erotic allusions than Jalaluddin al-Rumi, the namesake of Dhani's second-born son. He is perhaps the most explicit in linking spiritual union with worldly language. He writes: "I embraced her and my soul, after that, desired her again. And yet, who can be closer than an embrace?—And I kissed her lips to quench my thirst, but what I tasted only inflamed my thirst.—Now the burn of love inside me is so great that I cannot cure it by inhaling cool air.—Ah! The fever of my heart cannot be broke so long as our two souls are uncombined as one!"<sup>213</sup> Gazing on human beauty allows the mystic to contemplate more perfectly Divine beauty.<sup>214</sup> Schimmel observes that al-

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<sup>210</sup> Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, translated, edited and abridged by Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>212</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 70.

<sup>213</sup> Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, 161.

<sup>214</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 290.

Ghazali and many of the mystic poets believe that being true to a human beloved allows the mystic to learn true obedience for the Divine, who must be “obeyed absolutely.”<sup>215</sup>

Experiencing earthly love can also be means for non-mystics to enter the path, as illustrated in many legends of Sufi mythology. For instance, in the conversion story of the Persian mystic Hafiz (c. 1320-1389), the poet experienced a spiritual awakening only after falling in unrequited love for a beautiful woman outside of his social reach. In his despair, he held a forty-day vigil at a mosque. On the final day, at the height of his yearning, the angel Gabriel appeared and asked him what he desired most. The love that he had previously yearned for seemed insignificant compared to this window into the Divine, and Hafiz’s desire was transferred to that of spiritual longing. Through intense love for a person, Hafiz was guided to love of the Divine.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, even if the interpretation of Dhani’s love songs remains on the level of the profane, his work still contains potential merit in the Sufi tradition.

Though Dhani’s treatment of love is reminiscent of Hafiz and Rumi’s language of union, the obscurity within which he enfolds his language is more reminiscent of al-Hallaj. Though the lyrics of the *Cintailah Cinta* songs can be very easily interpreted within secular understandings of mystical union, his wording remains ambiguous. For example, in the song “Mistikus Cinta” (Mystical Love), a rather straightforward place to unearth Dhani’s philosophy on Sufi love, the refrain and chorus state:

Ketika jiwamu, merasuk ke dalam,	When your spirit penetrates to within
Aliran darahku dan meracuniku	My blood flow and poisons me
Ketika jiwamu, memeluk hatiku,	When your spirit embraces my heart,
dan biarkan jiwaku cumbui jiwamu	And allows my spirit to caress your spirit.
Ketika kamu aku,	When you and I,
Melebur menjadi satu	Merge to become one
Dan hanya waktu yang mungkin	And only time that possibly

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Daniel Ladinsky, *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz, the Great Sufi Master* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1999), 13-5.

bisa memahami apa yang terjadi	Can understand what occurred
Apa yang sedang kurasa,	What I now feel,
Apa yang sedang kau rasa	What you now feel,
Adalah cinta yang tak bisa	It is a love which can never
Dijelaskan dengan kata-kata	Be explained with words

While the song may be about an earthly love between two people, it also reveals the union of two spirits. Moreover, the singer is lost, engulfed in the greatness of that which he loves, symbolizing his powerlessness before a greater power. Similar to al-Hallaj, Dhani's poetry in this album can be taken to be speaking of a profane love. Considered within the context of his religious experience and guidance by a Sufi teacher, this interpretation seems less convincing. In fact, the first line of the refrain, "your spirit enters my blood stream and poisons me," is a highly unusual allusion for romantic love, but is much more easily understood within the framework of al-Hallaj, whose love of the Divine was only completed through his death.<sup>217</sup>

*Cintailah Cinta* is essentially a concept album, united by its exploration of Sufi spirituality, but devoid of any engagement with contemporary social issues. Each of the songs can be linked to specific beliefs in Sufism; for example, just as "Mistikus Cinta" can be understood in terms of Sufi love, so is "Kosong" (Empty) an exegesis of the principle of annihilation, that the experience of Divine love empties the heart of all but God's presence.<sup>218</sup> The ability of the songs to function on multiple levels made widespread acceptance of the album possible, and provided a transitional platform for Dhani to undertake more serious themes, bolstering his credibility as a commentator on Sufi Islam. In reality, this album was more challenging for fans because of the unexpected change in the members, as the lead singer Ari Lasso was replaced by Elfonda Mekel, known popularly as Once, who had served as a reserve

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<sup>217</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 135.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 130.

singer for the group since 1999. The success of the album under this new lineup ensured the success of the band, and established Dhani as the creative force of Dewa 19.

### 3.5 SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

Despite the Dewa 19 fans' mixed acceptance of the band's new singer, the overall success of *Cintailah Cinta* provided Dhani with the freedom to experiment more fully with Sufi ideologies. While previously, spirituality could function as an undertone in his music, in the subsequent album, *Laskar Cinta* (Warriors of Love), produced in 2004, these references were clearly articulated.

The immediate inspiration for *Laskar Cinta* followed a discussion between Dhani and his spiritual mentor. According to their associate, C. Holland Taylor, Faiz challenged Dhani to use his material success and fame to create "something useful."<sup>219</sup> In their conversations, they lamented that extremists and fundamentalists were conspiring to misrepresent Islam as a religion of hatred. This radical image of Islam was daily strengthened by the surfeit of media coverage given to Muslim terrorist organizations. Faiz reminded Dhani that instead of being a warrior of holy war (Laskar Jihad), the Muslim's task is to be a warrior of love (Laskar Cinta). He challenged Dhani to create a musical work that would discredit these misguided Muslims and restore the reputation of Islam as a religion of love.<sup>220</sup> As C. Holland Taylor states, the resultant album "hold(s) up a mirror in front of Muslims, to ask them, am I a warrior of Jihad which

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<sup>219</sup> Taylor, discussion.

<sup>220</sup> Bang Faiz, discussion with the author at his home in Malang, August 2007



understands Islam to mean the commission of atrocities, or am I a warrior of Love, that understands Islam to be a blessing for all creation?”<sup>221</sup>

The name for Dewa 19's seventh album, *Laskar Cinta* (Warrior of Love), directly references the Indonesian terrorist organization Laskar Jihad (Warrior of Jihad.) Formed in the 1980s, the organization grew in power during the social and political unrest that occurred in the wake of Suharto's authoritarian leadership, much of which was imbedded with the overtones of religious tension between Christians and Muslims.<sup>222</sup> During the time of the album's release (2004), Laskar Jihad was most prominent for its role in the inter-religious warfare on the island of Ambon between 1999 and 2002. Though inter-religious warfare erupted at various sites throughout Indonesia, in the Ambon crisis a small-scale Christian-Muslim conflict escalated into a national crisis when radical Muslim groups decreed the conflict a holy war. Laskar Jihad reputedly recruited and sent thousands of Muslim soldiers into Ambon to ensure the continuation of conflict.<sup>223</sup> This and other such actions prompted Faiz and Dhani to embark on a musical jihad. By parodying the name, switching war with love, Faiz and Dhani challenged the ideology of Laskar Jihad, which was equated in Indonesia at this time with radical Islam and violence. The distortion of the name immediately alerted listeners to an alternative expression of Islam, which is delivered in the Sufi spirituality of the song lyrics.

The idea that Dewa 19's album can be “useful” is indicative that Dhani and Faiz are consciously reimagining Dewa 19's music within the prevailing narrative of rock music, such as that discussed by Theodore Gracyk in his book *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*. Here, Gracyk considers and contests the common trope that “rock musicians are legitimate artists” who

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<sup>221</sup> Taylor, discussion.

<sup>222</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia* (Ithaca: SEAP Publications, 2006), 16-8.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

“fell victim” to corrupting, capitalist forces. Should musicians return to the golden age of rock, where “rock musicians drew their inspiration from poetry and Eastern religions,” the authenticity of the craft could be revered once more.<sup>224</sup> The attempt to make Dewa 19’s music useful could further potentially rescue the group from the drug scandals that had followed them throughout their first five albums, and restore their authenticity from the stigma of commercialism.

Declarations of the importance of their music had already been made about their previous album, *Cintailah Cinta*. For instance, after a Dewa 19 concert in 2004 in East Timor, Fauzi Bustami, the head of the Representative Office of the Republic of Indonesia in Dili, posited that the popularity of the band Dewa 19 was instrumental in eliminating animosity between the East Timorese and Indonesians, stating, “Anti-Indonesian sentiments are slowly melting now and the way I see it, what Dewa is doing is extraordinary.”<sup>225</sup> The quality of something “extraordinary” occurring in the ordinary—or in something as banal as a rock concert—is indicative of the cult of hero-worship surrounding rock bands, and demonstrates the popular need to idolize artists as more than just popular musicians but as social artists.<sup>226</sup> However, while for *Cintailah Cinta* Fauzi imposed the quality of being “extraordinary” on Dewa 19’s music, for the group’s seventh album, this goal was self-imposed, as Dhani struggled to execute the task of his teacher.

A comparison can be drawn between Dewa 19 under the guidance of Faiz, and the Beatles after their encounter with the Indian guru, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi taught transcendental meditation, which he designed to assist disciples in reaching a state of pure consciousness; through daily focus upon a mantra, or sound, the practitioner enhances his or her creativity. In the case of the Beatles, their engagement with these practices resulted in the inspiration for over forty songs that are suggestive of Hindu spirituality and promote themes of

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<sup>224</sup> Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 175-6.

<sup>225</sup> Kanis Dursin, “Music Draws E. Timorese Closer to Indonesians,” *Jakarta Post*, May 22, 2004.

<sup>226</sup> Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 184-5.

peace and unity.<sup>227</sup> Faiz's role is also that of a guru, a word of Sanskrit origin that is applied to Sufi teachers in Indonesia, and by which Dhani refers to Faiz. However, Faiz played a more direct role in the composition of Dewa 19's albums than did Maharishi for the Beatles. Faiz suggested ideas for songs, designed the artwork for Dewa 19's sixth album, and even composed one of the songs on the seventh, "Face it with a Smile." In this piece he resurrects the themes of the Beatles song "Let it Be," which further fortifies this tentative connection between the two groups, saying in the first and third stanzas:

Semua yang terjadi	Everything that happened
Biar terjadi	Let it be
Hadapi dengan tenang jiwa	Face it was a calm spirit
Semua... kan baik baik saja	Everything...will turn out alright.
Relakanlah saja ini	Just let this go
Bahwa semua yang terbaik	That's all for the best
Terbaik untuk kita semua	Best for everyone
Menyerahlah untuk menang	Surrender to win.

The connection is mainly lyrical, though musically the songs share a major tonality, a short repetitive melody, and a background choral section and organ interlude that gives them an almost hymn-like feel. This texture of Christianity is augmented in the Beatles' lyrics through their references to "Mother Mary," and in Bang Faiz's song through a unison choral repetition of the piece at the song's conclusion.

What is striking about such a comparison is that, while the Beatles draw on foreign, Eastern sounds to deepen the philosophical import of their music in a manner common to the rock's golden age of the 1960s,<sup>228</sup> Dhani and the band Dewa 19 instead practice an exoticization of their own traditions. Dewa 19 first became popular as Western-style rock musicians, and only afterwards did this originally East Javanese band begin interpolating philosophies from their

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<sup>227</sup> David R. Reck, "Beatles Orientalis: Influences from Asia in a Popular Song Tradition," *Asian Music* 16, no. 1 (1985), 110-11.

<sup>228</sup> Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 176.

region's dominant religion, Islam, into their music. Sufism partly derives its power through the mysterious. Knowledge is gained from long-term personal study, descending from teacher to student in an apprentice-like cycle; sharing that power without proper instruction can be dangerous.<sup>229</sup> In defining exoticism and the Orient, Edward Said has said that, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."<sup>230</sup> Dhani, however, borrows the idea of exoticism from the West, and through this, engages in exoticising his own traditions as the "Other." In much the same way that the Beatles did in their music, he interpolates Eastern philosophies in his Westernized rock song.

One of the most important differences between the Beatles and Dewa 19 is in the musical presentation of this relationship between East and West. The Beatles established their exoticism through Indian signifiers, such as the sitar playing of George Harrison in the songs most linked to their transcendental experimentation. For instance, in the song "The Inner Light" there is a musical suggestion of a synthesis between East and West. The lyrics are almost an exact replication of a Chinese Taoist poem, and the music combines the Beatles' standard rock sound with a ensemble of Indian musicians, including harmonium drone, shehnai, and santur. Structurally, the song further merges a heterophonic melodic line within a Western strophic structure and harmony. Because of this, David R. Reck, a scholar of the Beatles' music, observes that "The Inner Light" is "the last of the purely Indian songs, synthesizing Indian instruments and sound and forms with lyrics inspired by Eastern thought."<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia, ca. 1300 to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>230</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 3.

<sup>231</sup> Reck, 115.

In the self-exoticization of their songs, Dewa 19 does not include Eastern instruments as the Beatles did. None of Dhani's albums contain traditional stylistic elements; he intimated to one ethnomusicologist that "it was hard enough to write and produce good rock songs, let alone try to mix in traditional instruments."<sup>232</sup> His religiously inspired albums are in the same musical style as his purely secular albums; the only changes in the band's sound reflect contemporary trends in Indonesian rock music, such as an increased role for bass and added distortion. Stylistic changes occurred naturally as did the band's personnel, adding a new bass player for the album *Laskar Cinta*. Like the compositional processes of most rock bands, a leader (usually, but not always, Dhani) composes the main melody and lyrics, and the song takes shape through the practice sessions of the musicians.<sup>233</sup>

Many rock bands are almost resentful of writing "ethnic" configurations into their music. As Ungu musician Makki says, "Why should I write Javanese rock songs? Rock is my heritage too."<sup>234</sup> Terence Lancashire suggests that Asian bands that write within a purely Western style of music practice a reverse orientalism, driven by the same sense of fascination and newness that encourages Western musicians to look outside the borders of their own tradition.<sup>235</sup> Such artists tend to return to the local through their music videos and album packaging, in a "deliberate market strategy to increase the mystique of the music to the Western viewer/listener."<sup>236</sup> Partly, a fascination with Western rock music is indicative of what Jeremy Wallach deems to be a xenocentric expression of social hierarchy, as the music genres that are considered to be most prestigious in Indonesia are based on Western styles, the highest of course being the genre pop

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<sup>232</sup> Sutton, "Reform Art," 324.

<sup>233</sup> Yuke Sampurna, conversation with the author, July 2007.

<sup>234</sup> Makki Omar Parikesit (musician, Ungu), in discussion with the author, May 2007.

<sup>235</sup> Terence Lancashire, "World Music or Japanese—The Gagaku of Togi Hideki," *Popular Music* 22, no. 1 (January 2003), 21.

<sup>236</sup> Tony Mitchell, "World Music and the Popular Music Industry: An Australian View," *Ethnomusicology* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 1993), 315.

Indonesia, in which the music of Ungu and Dewa 19 impeccably fit.<sup>237</sup> The social elevation implied by listening to Western-style music over the equally popular but less status conscious non-Western musics reveals a tension “between the longing for a solidary, egalitarian national community on one hand and for modernity, affluence, identity, and consumerist lifestyle—for social distinction—on the other.”<sup>238</sup> However, even as Wallach acknowledges, the sheer diversity of Western popular music available in Indonesia, both locally produced and imported, supports Makki’s assertion that popular music is “his” music too.

### 3.6 EXPRESSING ONENESS: THE ALBUM *LASKAR CINTA*

The album *Laskar Cinta* is comprised of twelve songs: ten are in Indonesian, one is in English (“Sweetest Place”), and the final song (“Shine On”) combines verses in Indonesian with an English chorus (see figure 19).

<b>Song Title</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Pangeran Cinta	Prince of Love	4:41
Atas Nama Cinta	In the Name of Love	4:16
Satu	One	4:47
Indonesia Saja	Just Indonesia	2:45
Sweetest Place	[ <i>English</i> ]	2:18
Hidup Ini Indah	This Life is Beautiful	5:32
Cinta Gila	Crazy Love	5:11
Nonsens	Nonsense	4:21
Hadapi Dengan Senyuman	Face it with a Smile	4:11
Matahari Bintang Bulan	Sun, Star, and Moon	4:43
Aku Tetaplah Aku	I’m Still Me	2:34
Shine On	[ <i>English</i> ]	3:49

**Figure 19.** Song titles for the Dewa 19 album *Laskar Cinta*

<sup>237</sup> Wallach, “Exploring Class, Nation, and Xenocentrism,” 81.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 102.

The order of the songs reveals a circular motion, where the final song responds to the first with a message of unity and love to Dewa 19's listeners.

In the first song, "Pangeran Cinta" (Prince of Love), Dhani writes from the voice of Muhammad speaking his divine message to the people. The lyrics of the song are based on the Sura Al-Rahman, verse 27, which reads, "All that is on the earth shall perish, but the Face of the Lord shall abide forever." This verse holds particular significance for Sufis of the Wujudiyyah School of Sufism,<sup>239</sup> an order known for its belief that unity with the Divine is feasible through ritualized practice like the *zikir*.<sup>240</sup> Dhani paraphrases this verse in the chorus of the song, "All these things will be destroyed, but not my love for you (*Semua ini pasti akan musnah tetapi tidak cintaku padamu*)." The closing line of the chorus, "because I am the Prince of Love (*karena aku sang pangeran cinta*)," identifies the speaker as the Prophet Muhammad, who is often referred to in this manner. By placing this song as the first piece in the album, Dhani achieves three objectives: he indicates that this album is specifically Islamic, subtly connects the music to Sufi traditions sympathetic to the principle of *tauhid*, and positions himself as an authority of Islam, by basing his music firmly within a Qur'anic tradition.

Musically and philosophically, "Pangeran Cinta" sets the stage for the central themes of the album. Musically it entails a more prominent bass line playing a focal rhythmic and harmonic ostinato pattern, an overall more distorted sound, and a more strictly two-part vocal section between the singers than in previous Dewa 19 albums. While this is not indicative of all the songs in the album, these are generally new elements in their music, refined throughout their next several albums.

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<sup>239</sup> Hamdi and Shofwan, "Ada al-Hallaj."

<sup>240</sup> Tommy Christomy, "Signs of the Wali: Narratives at the Sacred Sites in Pamijahan, West Java" (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008).

The repeating pattern in the bass line contributes a sense of overall musical cohesion (figure 20).



**Figure 20. Bass ostinato for verse of Dewa 19's song, "Pangeran Cinta"**

Underlying each of the verses, the pattern changes slightly during the chorus (figure 21), as the final measure ascends in stepwise motion to return to the opening note of the pattern:



**Figure 21. Bass ostinato for chorus of Dewa 19's song, "Pangeran Cinta"**

The musical unity in the bass line alerts the listener to another unity that acts as the main philosophical goal of the album—that of an implied unity between the God and man and between humans, achieved through the divine love of the creator. Though “everything that is on the earth will be annihilated” (Sura 26: 27), the final annihilation is for the individual to become immersed in the experience of God. This experience first occurs during one’s lifetime, but is finalized only in death.<sup>241</sup>

Throughout the presentation of the twelve songs, these two themes of love and unity are developed and expanded in three main ways: through spiritual and political understandings of unity, and as an appeal for unity from Dewa 19 listeners.

Spiritually, this theme reaches its fruition during the ballad “Satu” (One), which depicts a total unification between two entities, presumably God and Man.<sup>242</sup> Dhani writes:

Aku ini adalah dirimu	This I is your self
Cinta ini adalah cintamu	This love is your love
Aku ini adalah dirimu	This I is your self
Jiwa ini adalah jiwamu	This soul is your soul

<sup>241</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 142-3.

<sup>242</sup> “Satu.” Youtube. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hts\\_XSaZHto](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hts_XSaZHto) (accessed March 21, 2010).



Rindu ini adalah rindumu  
Darah ini adalah darahmu

This longing is your longing  
This blood is your blood.

Tak ada yang lain selain dirimu  
Yang selalu ku puja  
Ku sebut namamu  
Di setiap hembusan nafasku  
Ku sebut namamu.

There is nothing else but you.  
Whom I worship always  
I call your name  
With each breath I take  
I call your name.

Dengan tanganmu aku menyentuh  
Dengan kakimu aku berjalan  
Dengan matamu aku memandang  
Dengan telingamu aku mendengar  
Dengan lidahmu aku bicara  
Dengan hatimu aku merasa

With your hands I touch  
With your feet I walk  
With your eyes I see  
With your ears I hear  
With your tongue I speak  
With your heart I feel

The lyrics of “Satu” express tauhid not only as knowledge that divine unity exists, but also that God’s presence is visible in all things. [To listen to this song, refer to the attached sound file, Dewa19\_Satu.mp3.]

Many mystics justify this conviction through the Qur’an, citing Sura 2: 209, “Whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God.”<sup>243</sup> This interpretation is strengthened by Dhani’s dedication of the song to Syekh Lemah Abang, a pseudonym for the Javanese saint Syekh Siti Jenar. Publically executed for preaching tauhid, the myths surrounding his death share many common elements with that of al-Hallaj,<sup>244</sup> the mystic with whom Dhani is most often compared. In fact, according to the research of C. Holland Taylor of the non-government organization LibForAll Foundation, many preachers of radical mosques describe Dhani as the new Siti Jenar, and in so doing recognize the dangerous elements of his musical preaching.<sup>245</sup>

Musically, “Satu” is reminiscent of the balladic style from Dewa 19’s previous albums, particularly the sixth, *Cintailah Cinta*. This is most noticeable in its avoidance of a driving rhythmic ostinato that is so prominent in the bass lines of songs like “Pangeran Cinta.” The

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<sup>243</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 147.

<sup>244</sup> Florida, *Writing the Past*, 364.

<sup>245</sup> Taylor, discussion.

concept of oneness is, however, emphasized in another ostinato underlying the piece, this time performed by the synthesizer and guitar. In its first rendition, repeated six times, it consists of a half-step alternation between two notes. In its second version, an interval of a major third is added (figure 22).



**Figure 22. Opening ostinato in Dewa 19's song "Satu"**

This pattern underlies the entirety of the verses, except one notable alteration in the final two lines of the verse which eliminates the E-flat chromaticism (figure 23).



**Figure 23. Ostinato alteration, eliminating chromatic Eb in Dewa 19's song "Satu"**

The two competing patterns suggest a musical skirmish between a minor and major IV chord. The skirmish continues in the chorus sections, as the original pattern is augmented again (see figure 24).



**Figure 24. Augmented ostinato in Dewa 19's song "Satu"**

The first staff of music is written on a five-line staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of the following notes: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half), and B3 (half). The staff ends with a double bar line.

Dhani calls attention to the political implications of unity most clearly in the song “Indonesia Saja” (Just Indonesia). In language reminiscent of the national motto, *Bhinneka*

Aku bukan orang Jawa                      I'm not Javanese

Aku juga bukan Sunda	I'm not Sundanese
Aku bukan orang Aceh	I'm not Acehnese
Aku juga bukan Ambon	I'm not Ambonese
Aku bukan Cina	I'm not Chinese
Aku juga bukan Barat	I'm not Western
Aku bukan kiri	I'm not Left
Aku juga bukan kanan	I'm not Right
Aku bukan hijau	I'm not Green
Aku juga bukan merah	I'm not Red
Aku hanya merasa	I only feel that
Aku orang Indonesia saja	I'm Indonesian, that's all.

While the lyrics of “Satu” depict the spiritual aspects of unity, “Indonesia Saja” explores the meaning of unity purely on the level of mankind, and in so doing illustrates a prominent concept in modern Indonesian nationalist identity. Dhani deemphasizes difference along lines of religion (Green, the color of Islam), ethnicity (Javanese, Sundanese, etc.), and ideology (Red, the color of communism; left or right), instead ascribing greater importance to feelings of national identity.

As Benedict Anderson has written, the concept of unity in Indonesian nationalism has “deep psychological power,” in contemporary Indonesia far greater than a mere political doctrine. He writes:

The urge to oneness, so central to Javanese political attitudes, helps to explain the deep psychological power of the idea of nationalism in Java. Far more than a political credo, nationalism expresses a fundamental drive to solidarity and unity in the face of the disintegration of traditional society under colonial capitalism, and other powerful external forces, from the late nineteenth century on. Nationalism of this type is something far stronger than patriotism; it is an attempt to reconquer a primordial oneness.<sup>247</sup>

Such an urge towards “primordial oneness” resurfaces repeatedly in historical narratives in Java, the historical authenticity of many of which is obscured in myth. Of particular relevance is the narrative of Syekh Siti Jenar, to whom Dhani dedicated the song “Satu.” In the political transition between two Javanese kingdoms, Majapahit (1293 to c. 1500) and Demak (c. 1476 to 1546), Jenar was not executed so much for his belief in tauhid, known popularly as *Manunggaling kawula gusti*, which was largely considered valid by other Javanese theologians at that time. Rather, he was executed for preaching tauhid openly to the uninitiated masses and thereby threatening Islamic law, upon which the Islamic Kingdom of Demak was politically based.<sup>248</sup> This point is affirmed in the many myths surrounding his death, much as in the case of al-Hallaj after his martyrdom. In one version, Siti Jenar’s head reaffixes to his body and

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<sup>247</sup> Anderson, *Language and Power*, 37.

<sup>248</sup> Ricklefs, *History of Modern Indonesia*, 64.

proclaims the divine unity before ascending to heaven of its own volition. In this way, Jenar's philosophy could live on, though with his body gone he could serve no further political threat.<sup>249</sup>

Though musical illustrations of political unity are more difficult to determine, video versions of the songs often engage these themes. For example, the song "Satu," which is otherwise only a spiritual expression of unity, takes on additional political meaning in the video. Each of the four band members depicts a differing religious leader: Tyo, the drummer is seen as the Hindu hero Rama; Yuke the bassist, is a Buddhist monk; the lead singer Once, who is himself Christian, portrays Jesus; and the band leader Dhani plays the part of a whirling dervish. Spiritually this represents that currents of mysticism exist in all the major faiths of Indonesia, but politically it is an artistic representation of the nationalist principle of Pancasila. One of the founding ideologies of Indonesia, Pancasila pronounces adherence to the five principles of monotheism, nationalism, humanism, social justice and democracy.<sup>250</sup> The first tenet of monotheism is further refined to belief in one of five accepted religions, Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The video does not stay within these borders of acceptability by depicting only nationally recognized religious traditions, as the final band member, Andre, is depicted as a Hasidic Jew. As Judaism is a monotheistic religion, Dhani continues to promote nationalist ideology, but also comments on it, since Judaism is not one of the five permissible religions.

The third method of expressing unity in the album is in the form of a message to his listeners, to sow the seeds of a divine spirituality within a contemporary earthly setting. In this way, Dhani combines the spiritual and political themes of unity into an active message that is

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<sup>249</sup> Florida, *Writing the Past*, 364.

<sup>250</sup> Geertz, *Religion of Java* 115.

fundamentally “useful,” as his teacher Faiz had originally requested. This is represented best in the final song, “Shine On.”

Hidup ini punya sejuta warna  
Tak hanya hitam putih  
Begitu adanya

This life has a million colors  
Not only black and white  
There are so many

Apa yang kamu yakini sebagai  
Sebuah kebenaran  
Mungkin bukanlah sebuah kebenaran  
Buat yang lainnya

Whatever you are sure is  
A truth  
Maybe is not a truth  
For somebody else

Shine on, shine on  
Let's make harmony  
For a better future

Shine on, shine on,  
Let's make harmony  
For a better future

Buat harmoni  
Biar bumi ini jadi lebih indah  
Untuk anak kita

Make harmony  
So this world becomes more beautiful  
For our children

As in “Indonesia Saja” Dhani encourages his listeners to acknowledge difference but not let it become the focus of attention. Instead the focus is on sameness, (the future of our children, and using that difference to create harmony), which again reiterates the Indonesian national motto, “Unity in Diversity.”

Musically, “Shine On” unites the two competing styles present in the album: the balladic style held over from previous albums demonstrated by songs like “Satu,” and the more rhythmic impulses of songs like “Pangeran Cinta.” It is still a ballad, but it also applies the fuller sound of the rhythmic style. Linguistically, by combining an English-language chorus with verses in Indonesian, it unites two other contradictory languages always present in Dhani’s spiritual songs. In a simplistic interpretation, the English chorus speaks to the rock sound of the West, while the Indonesian speaks to the philosophic, mystical language of the East, missing, of course, any allusion to mystic traditions of the so-called West.

Finally, “Shine On” acts as a rejoinder to the opening song in the album, and provides closure to the journey undertaken in the twelve songs. The listener travels between the message of love and unity provided by the voice of the Prophet in “Prince of Love,” to the voice of Dhani, a musician and Indonesian appealing for harmony. The listener continues in an exploration of Sufi principles throughout the course of the album, which appear to be authoritative through clear references to the Qur’an and allusions to Indonesian Sufi traditions. The two voices—divine inspiration and earthly seeker—are united as one through their common plea for togetherness in spiritual love.

### 3.7 CRITICISM AND RESPONSE

*Laskar Cinta* was well received by Dewa 19 fans, but the album’s immediate release caused a certain amount of controversy. Dhani’s reference to Laskar Jihad in the album title did not go unnoticed, and was immediately made clear in the Indonesian press. On the date of the album launching, a *Kompas*<sup>251</sup> journalist asked Dhani to describe the difference between Laskar Jihad and Laskar Cinta. He answered, “Jelas kalau yang pertama menyebarkan kebencian kepada sesama manusia, maka yang kedua menularkan kasih kepada semua orang. Semua orang Indonesia yang berpikiran sehat pasti sepakat menyetujuiinya.” (Laskar Jihad spreads hatred for one’s fellow man, and the latter spreads love for all humanity. Any Indonesian who thinks with a healthy heart and mind, will agree that what I say is true.”<sup>252</sup> This direct challenge to Islamic radical movements in Indonesia aired on national television and throughout various newspapers in the months following the album’s release.

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<sup>251</sup> *Kompas* is Indonesia’s leading paper for national news.

<sup>252</sup> Ruzdy Nurdiansyah, “Laskar Cinta Sensai Kebablasan Dewa,” *Republika*, April 17, 2005.

Beyond the title, the greater controversy arose from the album cover, which depicted the title of the album in a psuedo-Arabic calligraphy in the Roman alphabet, beneath which was centered an octagonal star (figure 26).



**Figure 26. Cover art for Dewa 19's seventh album, *Laskar Cinta*, second printing**

While art has not been particularly revered in Muslim societies, the exception to this rule is calligraphy, the aesthetics of handwriting.<sup>253</sup> In addition to immediately recognizable lettering, calligraphic styles developed that measured letters in systematic patterns of dots, circles, and semi-circles, which could transform a manuscript into an intricately designed painting, illegible to the untrained eye.<sup>254</sup> One such symbol was the star symbol on the *Laskar Cinta* album cover, which is a modified figure of a calligraphic symbol depicting the word Allah (figure 27).

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<sup>253</sup> Sheila S. Blair and Jonathon M. Bloom, "Art and Architecture: Themes and Variations," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. by John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 216.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.





**Figure 27. Arabic calligraphic art of the word “Allah”<sup>255</sup>**

In Dhani’s apparent captivation by the design, the band decorated their bass drum, studio wall, and other band paraphernalia with the calligraphic image.<sup>256</sup> One viewer, Wahfiudin, was particularly outraged when, in a televised performance several months later, he saw the lead singer, Once, walking and performing on top of the Dewa 19 version of the star, which had been painted on the television studio’s stage. In the ensuing controversy that came to involve the television studio managers of TransTV, major newspapers including *Kompas* and *Republika*, Internet dialogues, and leading religious figures in Indonesia, Habib Rizieq of the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, or FPI)<sup>257</sup> demanded that the logo be replaced. Despite support from the majority of Indonesian religious leaders, Dhani consented to modify the symbol, and destroy any remaining copies of the original. He stated that his decision was taken partly to avoid being as obstinate as members of the FPI, but otherwise admitted no

<sup>255</sup> Redrawn for this study by Deanna Yildiz.

<sup>256</sup> Hidayat, “Ideology, Sikap dan Otak,” 45; Hamdi and Shofwan, “Ada al-Hallaj.”

<sup>257</sup> Hamdi and Shofwan, “Ada al-Hallaj.”

wrongdoing.<sup>258</sup> He justified his use of the star symbol through reference to Sura 21: 115, “Whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah’s countenance.” The eight points of the star symbolize the eight geographical directions, and reflect the idea that God’s love spreads in all directions.<sup>259</sup> This justification is similar to the common Sufi justification of tauhid, that God’s presence is everywhere and in all things, which is often connected to this Qur’anic reference.<sup>260</sup>

Despite his capitulation, Dhani and Dewa 19 continue to face certain criticism from Islamic radicals, who view Dewa 19 members as Zionist agents. Some of these claims were made based on the cover artwork of Dewa 19’s earlier albums, for instance alleging that the design on *Cintailah Cinta* was actually a Jewish symbol, the Eye of Horus (even though the Eye of Horus is actually Egyptian, not Jewish). During the time of Dewa 19’s condemnation by the FPI, these criticisms were partly assuaged by an award given to Dewa 19 in 2005 “for their outstanding contribution to world peace and presenting the true face of Islam to Indonesia and to the world.”<sup>261</sup> The award was bestowed by the LibForAll Foundation and dually presented by Abdurrahman Wahid, president of Nahdatul Ulama, and Abdul Munir Mul Khan, then vice-secretary of Muhammadiyah. Both organizations comprise the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, and represent both modernist and traditionalist trends of Islam in Indonesia. The joining of the two organizations to make the award to Dhani thus had symbolic significance as a gesture of Islamic solidarity in support of Dewa 19’s message.<sup>262</sup> Dhani was further instated as a board member of the LibForAll Foundation, where he continues to serve with some of Indonesia’s most important Islamic intellectuals, including both Wahid and Munir.

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Hamdi and Shofwan, “Ada al-Hallaj.”

<sup>260</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 146.

<sup>261</sup> Taylor, discussion.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

The LibForAll Foundation assisted in restoring Dewa 19's reputation following the attack by radical Muslims, and Dhani artistically responded a year later by releasing Dewa 19's eighth album, *Republik Cinta* (Republic of Love), produced in 2006. While this album is in most respects a return to secular music writing, the first and second songs, "Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 and 2," are a two-part culmination of Dhani's religious messages from his prior albums, as well as a final musical defense against the critiques leveled against him by radical Muslims. Whereas the album *Laskar Cinta* provided listeners with a general overview on mystic conceptions of unity, the song version functions as a case study for the musical union of two opposing viewpoints, which will be discussed more completely below. Dhani defended the use of the seventh album's title for these two songs from the position of rock music, citing a similar occurrence by one of his main influences, Queen,<sup>263</sup> who is popular amongst Indonesian artists.

One of the reasons that "Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 & 2" is so successful is because musically and ideologically it resonates with the Islamic revivalist movement that has enjoyed increased popularity in Indonesia since the early 1990s. This movement is largely "scripturalist," meaning that it disavows Sufi philosophies and traditions.<sup>264</sup> Even as Howell argues that "scripturalist piety is only part of the picture of Islamic revival in Indonesia in the latter twentieth century,"<sup>265</sup> Dhani projects this image of scripturalist piety within an underlay of Sufi inspiration. This unification of the tenets of Sufi spirituality with scripturalist Islam is achieved textually, visually, and musically. In each of these ways, Dewa 19 creates links

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<sup>263</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Indonesia's Warrior of Love: Unlikely Champion of Moderate Islam," *Daily Standard* (Washington, DC), November 15, 2006.

<sup>264</sup> Howell, "Sufism," 702.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

between Arabic markers of Islam that are now common to Indonesia, and Indonesian and Arabic mystic traditions.<sup>266</sup>

Textually, the lyrics to the songs “Laskar Cinta,” Chapters 1 and 2 consist of a lengthy narrative in the tradition of *dakwah*, “the call,” or the “propagation of the faith,”<sup>267</sup> often performed by a respected preacher. In Indonesia, “dakwah movements” have been historically at odds with Sufi traditions, and it has only been recently, partly under the direction of Munir, that the leadership of dakwah movements have experienced a “turning towards Sufism” to furnish Muslims with necessary spiritual sustenance.<sup>268</sup> Referencing a dakwah style is the first of several ways that this song unites ideologies of scripturalist and Sufi traditions. The first chapter of the song consists of three main sections, which will be used to consider the lyrics in entirety. The three sections include: 1) a general call to Muslims; 2) the lesson, providing the teachings of Islam; and 3) the command, or directive for Muslims to complete after listening to the song. Each of the three sections is justified in the Qur’an or hadith, to which Munir has written a detailed explanation published on the LibForAll Foundation website.

In the general call to his followers, Dhani keeps within the tradition of Islamic rock music discussed earlier by not differentiating between Muslims and non-Muslims. He beckons:

Wahai, jiwa jiwa yang tenang  
Berhati hati lah dirimu  
Kepada hati hati yang penuh  
Dengan kebencian yang dalam  
hate

Hey there, all you lovers of peace  
Watch out, watch out and be on guard  
For lost souls, anger twisting their hearts  
For lost souls, poisoned by ignorance and  
<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> View “Laskar Cinta Chapter 1” via Youtube at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igNSD90IYPo&feature=Playlist&p=D88A30A706F80A9E&playnext\\_from=PL&playnext=1&index=64](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igNSD90IYPo&feature=Playlist&p=D88A30A706F80A9E&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=64) (accessed March 21, 2010).

<sup>267</sup> Blair and Bloom, *Art and Architecture*, 70.

<sup>268</sup> Howell, “Sufism,” 712.

<sup>269</sup> The English version is not an exact translation, but was re-written together by Dhani and C. Holland Taylor. A more literal translation might read: “Hey there, peaceful souls, Guard yourselves from hearts full of deep hatred.” All subsequent translations will be that of the English-language version of the song.

Dhani doesn't specify Muslims, but rather calls all people with a peaceful spirit. In his exegesis of the song, Munir indicates that a true Muslim should respond to this title, given that the Sura Al Fajr, verse 28 identifies Muslims as "souls at peace."<sup>270</sup> Much as Aa Gym does in the song "Jagalah Hati," discussed in the previous chapter, Dhani differentiates between those souls who love peace, and those whose hearts who are angry and full of hate. The implication is that a pure heart is calm, and an angry heart has been twisted or poisoned, lost from its path and original state of being. Like Aa Gym, Dhani reiterates al-Ghazali's philosophy that "believers must guard the hearts from such a fate" and "be on guard."<sup>271</sup>

In the second section of the song, Dhani provides a lesson of his account of the teachings of Islam.

Karena, sesungguhnya iblis ada dan bersemayam Di hati yang penuh dengan benci Di hati yang penuh dengan prasangka	There's no doubt, evil dwells in the hearts Of all those who are full of hate There's no doubt, evil dwells in the souls Of all those full of prejudice
Jika kebencian meracunimu kepada manusia lainnya. Maka sesungguhnya iblis sudah berkuasa atas dirimu	If hatred has already poisoned you Against those ... who worship differently Then evil has already gripped your soul Then evil's got you in its damning embrace
Maka jangan pernah berharap Aku akan mengasihi menyayangi manusia manusia yang penuh benci seperti kamu blood	If so, don't bother to hope or dream that I'll ever love or embrace People full of hate and anger like you People who're always full of lust for others

This section associates the feelings of hatred and suspicion, which contaminate the heart, as the work of the devil (*iblis*). Those who preach hatred or discrimination are thus performing the devil's work, rather than God's. Therefore God, according to Dewa 19, will never welcome

<sup>270</sup> Abdul Munir Mulkhan, "A Musical Fatwa Against Religious Hatred and Terrorism through a Notation of Sources (al-Qur'an & Hadiths)," <http://www.libforall.org/popculture-musical-fatwa-lyrics.html> (accessed June, 18, 2008).

<sup>271</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Dalal) and Five Key Texts*, 3rd ed, translated by R. J. McCarthy (Cambridge: Fons Vitae, 2000).

people whose hearts are full of hatred. Munir links the first two stanzas to verses in the Qur'an that renounce hatred, suspicion, envy, and dishonesty in favor of repentance and mercy, while the final stanza he relates to the hadith, "Allah will only come to the aid of those who are happy to aid others."<sup>272</sup>

The third section is a command, reiterated three times as a refrain: spread love and teach love, for "love is the eternal truth." The refrain states:

Laskar Cinta	Warriors of love
Sebarkanlah benih benih cinta	Spread the seeds of love throughout the earth
Musnahkanlah virus virus benci	Go and destroy the virus of hatred
Virus yang bisa merusakkan hati	That makes people's hearts sick and depraved
Dan busukkan hati	By corrupting their souls
Laskar Cinta	Warriors of Love
Ajarkanlah ilmu tentang cinta	Teach the mystical science of love
Karena cinta adalah hakikat	For only love is the eternal truth
Dan jalan yang terang bagi semua	And the shining path for all
umat manusia	God's children everywhere in the world

Again, Munir relates the refrain to verses in the Qur'an, such as the book of al-Maida, in which people are required to "help one another in righteousness and piety."<sup>273</sup> While the referencing of Qur'anic verses in this manner is a gesture of affiliation with scripturalism, this refrain also contains the clearest references to a strictly Sufi understanding of Islam, through the penultimate clause, "only love is the eternal truth." This statement, in Indonesian using a word derived from Arabic, says that love is "*hakikat*," which Dhani and Taylor translate as "the eternal truth." Hakikat, which does mean truth, is one of the triune levels of Sufism, indeed the highest stage. Before one can confirm the truth, one must be familiar with the first two levels, *Shariah*, the law, and *tarikah*, the path.<sup>274</sup> Sometimes substituted with *makrifat*, meaning gnosis, hakikat becomes

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<sup>272</sup> Mulkhan, "Musical Fatwa."

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 16.

evident when both the self and the other are subsumed within the essence of the divine.<sup>275</sup> Love as the truth, or *hakikat*, is a point that the music video emphasizes, as these words are printed over the final scene, which finally fades out.

One final point of interest that arises from the refrain is the final two words, “umat manusia.” Umat, from the Arabic word *ummah*, refers to the community of believers unified both politically and spiritually under the direction of a religious leader.<sup>276</sup> In such a definition, one recalls the texts of political and spiritual unity present in the album *Laskar Cinta*. Such an ideal was thought to exist under the leadership of Muhammad and the earliest caliphs, but became untenable as the Islamic empire expanded and civil wars erupted.<sup>277</sup> While *ummah* refers to the unity of Muslims believers, Dhani transforms the meaning to include people of all faiths by adding the word *manusia*, mankind, or the community of all human beings, which Dhani and Taylor further translate as “God’s children everywhere in the world.” This line serves the tripartite function of: 1) emphasizing the totalizing aspect of Dhani’s philosophy of political and spiritual unity presented in these two albums, 2) reiterating that though his language is Muslim, he is speaking to people of all faiths, and 3) joining the language of scripturalist Muslims with an inclusive spirituality, thereby textually unifying the two conflicting movements in contemporary Indonesian Islam.

“Laskar Cinta, Chapter 1” elides into Chapter 2; alone it does not constitute a complete musical work, especially as it does not reach a final cadence on the tonic. Musically “Laskar Cinta, Chapter 2” serves as a coda in which the main themes are reiterated in the first stanza:

Wahai jiwa-jiwa yang tenang  
jangan sekalikali kamu...

Hey there, all you lovers of peace,  
don’t ever don’t ever don’t ever don’t

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>276</sup> Fred M. Donner, “Muhammad and the Caliphate: Political History of the Islamic Empire up to the Mongol Conquest” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. by John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

Mencoba jadi Tuhan dengan mengadili dan mengahakimi	Try to play God, By judging and condemning anyone different from you
Bahwasanya kamu memang tak punya daya dan upaya Serta kekuatan untuk menentukan kebenaran yang sejati	For God has not given you the right to be mankind's judge and jury Nor the power to know the ultimate truth, Or to tell others what they must do

As he does in the verses of “Laskar Cinta, Chapter 1,” Dhani calls to the *umat manusia*, those with peaceful spirits, and warns them against judging and condemnations others. The second stanza intensifies this reiteration by clearly paraphrasing a commonly cited section of scripture, Sura 49: 13,<sup>278</sup> and dramatically imaging separation (*bercerai-cerai*) and war (*berperang*). He writes:

Bukankah kita memang tercipta laki-laki dan wanita Dan menjadi suku-suku dan bangsa-bangsa yang pasti berbeda	Weren't all of us created as either Men or women, on this earthly plane Destined to become many tribes and lands No two of them exactly the same?
Bukankah kita memang harus saling mengenal dan menghormati Bukan untuk saling bercerai-cerai dan berperang angkat senjata	Why don't we understand and respect All of our brothers' and sisters' pain, Rather than turn into murderous demons, With our bloody arms raised to the sky?

The English-language version of the song employs more dramatic imagery than the Indonesian lyrics, depicting the transformation of humanity from a portrayal of familial understanding to that of “murderous demons” with “bloody arms raised to the sky.” Theologically, this is again—albeit in a rather theatrical rendering—al-Ghazali’s philosophy that the believer must guard against corruption (see chapter 2), which Dhani indicates has the power to ultimately subvert God’s will, destroy the hearts of humankind, and set family members against one another.

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<sup>278</sup> Mulkhan, “Musical Fatwa.” Sura 49:13 states: “O mankind! We created you from a single pair, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another, and not to despise each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).”



Up to this point, we have discussed how Dhani achieves a synthesis between Sufi and scripturalist Islam through the song's text. Visually and musically, such an alliance is also achieved. Recall from chapter 2 that, within the popular music tradition of scripturalist Islam, nasyid singers and audiences carefully craft performance indicators that associate the musical experience with neorevivalist understandings of Islam. Concerts usually begin with introductions in Arabic, women and men sit on opposite sides of the performance space, and an Arabic style of traditional Islamic dress is maintained. Consider for example the costume of the nasyid group Snada (figure 28).



**Figure 28. Members of the nasyid group Snada pose in their performance costume**

In contrast, rock groups that release religious albums make very little attempt to similarly “appear Muslim” through visual indicators. Like these rock bands, Dewa 19’s performance costumes never looked specifically Muslim, even for the album *Laskar Cinta*. In fact, some of the photos in that particular album verged on scandalous, including a photo of the bass player Yuke where he appeared to be wearing nothing under his overcoat (figure 29).



**Figure 29. Photo of Dewa 19 members from the album insert of *Laskar Cinta* (left to right: Dhani, Tyo, Yuke, Once, Andre)**

Yuke himself stated that it became clear to him upon joining Dewa 19 for the album *Laskar Cinta* that one ambition of the band was to be trendsetters in Western-style fashion.<sup>279</sup> However, after releasing the song version of “Laskar Cinta,” the band suddenly sat for a photo wearing Islamic dress (figure 30).

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<sup>279</sup> Yuke, conversation.



**Figure 30. Photo of Dewa 19 members for the song "Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 & 2" (left to right, Tyo, Andre, Dhani, Yuke, Once)<sup>280</sup>**

This in no way signifies that Dewa 19 members suddenly believed that being a Muslim necessitated wearing a certain type of clothing. Remember that Once, the lead singer, is in fact Christian, which is perhaps indicated by his lack of a skullcap in the photograph. Part of the answer can be determined from a prank that Dhani played in 2004 following the scandals of the *Laskar Cinta* cover design. After being required to appear at the police headquarters, Dhani dressed his children in the attire of FPI, the extremist group that threatened Dhani's life. He explained his actions ironically, saying: "Ya anak-anak kecil kayak gini yang pantes pake gitu-gitu. Itu kan pesennya dalem." (It is appropriate for young children like these to wear this kind of clothing. They have such a deep meaning).<sup>281</sup> In this way, Dhani makes a statement about the level of knowledge about Islam that a visual element like clothing indicates. As he does in the text of "Laskar Cinta, Chapter 1," Dhani reveals the difference between shariah and hakikat. The

<sup>280</sup> Photo by C. Holland Taylor

<sup>281</sup> Hamdi and Shofwan, "Ada al-Hallaj."

outwardly visual symbols of being Muslim, such as dressing in a certain way, are only superfluous features of being a Muslim, capable of being understood by a child, whereas the philosophy that “love is the eternal truth” is the deepest aspect of Islam. This latter insight cannot be symbolized in something as simple as clothing. In this way, Dhani criticizes those Muslims that focus on practicing only law, without moving towards a more sophisticated understanding of the religion.

The visual part of the band’s performance of the song demonstrates a more stunning unification of Sufi spirituality and scripturalist Islam. In performance, dancers in white robes spin in imitation of the rituals of the Sufi Mevlevi sect, known popularly as whirling dervishes. Perhaps the most well-known ritual movement of Sufi cultures, the order of the whirling dervishes was established upon the death of their leader, the poet Jalaluddin Rumi, and first organized by his son, Sultan Walad.<sup>282</sup> Rumi wrote that the movement of the dance nourishes the soul, sets it free, and allows the soul to join in the dance of creation.<sup>283</sup> The whirling of the Mevlevi sect is one aspect of practicing spiritual meditation through the total integration of music with prayer, singing and dance, in a variant on the Sufi tradition of *sama*.<sup>284</sup> In concert, these individual aspects of *sama* (meaning audition), incline the heart to “an awareness and understanding” of the Divine through an increased focus on song, in a manner common to many Sufi traditions.<sup>285</sup> The significance of the circular motion of the dervishes, while mimicking the perambulation performed by Rumi during his first mystic experience, also has broader significance in Islam, symbolizing “completion or perfection.”<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 315.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>284</sup> Leonard Lewisohn, “The Sacred Music of Islam: Sama in the Persian Sufi tradition,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6 (1997), 1.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>286</sup> Ladinsky, *The Gift*, 14.

In the MTV version of “Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 & 2,” the Islamic significance of the song abounds. Laborers are depicted in chains in a quarry where the devil reigns, when the universal message of love and unity frees them, conveyed by the sudden appearance of the whirling dervishes (figure 31).



**Figure 31. Whirling dervishes, MTV video of "Laskar Cinta"**

At the end of the piece, the band members are seen without their instruments, singing and preaching in unison, to which the newly freed laborers respond with devotion (figure 32).



**Figure 32. Band members with quarry laborers, MTV video of "Laskar Cinta"**

That the band members are seen without their instruments is significant in that it further resembles the a cappella singing groups of neo-revivalist music styles like nasyid, where the acceptability of instruments is in doubt (as discussed in chapter 1).<sup>287</sup> Their hands raised to demonstrate solidarity at the video conclusion, the five Dewa 19 members face the crowd of simply dressed workers, who are dressed symbolically in white, suggestive of their reborn purity. The costumes of the Dewa 19 members are interestingly a fairly strict uniform; Dhani's coat is further made unique with added decorative buttons and a red line on the edges, providing an impression of a military uniform. Perhaps this is indicative of Dhani's politics, as his admiration for Indonesia's first military leader Sukarno is well-known. As Dhani stated, "Negara kita belum siap dipimpin oleh sipil. Gue nggak cocok dengan mahasiswa. Mereka rata-rata demo tidak cocok dengan militer. Gue nggak. Gue setuju militer." (Our Country isn't ready to be led by a

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<sup>287</sup> Amnon Shiloah, *Music in Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 145.

civilian government...I believe in the military).<sup>288</sup> [To listen to these songs, refer to the attached sound files, Dewa19\_LaskarCinta1.mp3 and Dewa19\_LaskarCinta2.mp3.]

Musically, the synthesis between Sufi and scripturalist Islam is achieved through a gradual transition from Dewa 19's customary voice to one that is suggestive of more conservative sub-genre of Islamic music. As stated before, the aversion to performing on musical instruments is assuaged if those instruments are linked to the Middle East, particularly percussion including a variety of Arabic drums, and especially single-headed frame drums, such as the tambourine-like instrument *rebana*. Especially in Islamic boarding schools, students learn to play these frame drums to accompany their chants and prayer. While *munsyid* (nasyid singers) most often do not play instruments themselves, these and other Arabic drums often accompany their distinctly pop sound. Not including live instruments allows the emphasis to be on dakwah, preaching that is imparted through the song lyrics, which is important since munsyid are considered Muslim leaders first, and musicians second.

While the arrangement of "Laskar Cinta, Chapter 1 and 2" is clearly rock, with a heavy reliance on instrumental distortion, it also transitions into a style that is strongly affiliated with these musical dakwah styles. The band plays an accompanimental role to the dominant vocal line. This is the only song that I am aware of in the Dewa 19 repertoire that does not include any solo instrumental sections. Each verse proceeds immediately to the next without break. In addition to heavily distorted guitar and bass, Dewa 19 introduces Arabic instruments to give the piece a more conservative traditional sound. An oud-like instrument plays a riff to bridge the verses, and at the end of the piece, all the Western-style instruments drop out, replaced by all the band members singing in unison and performing on rebana, an instrument normally used in Islamic prayer rituals. At the end of the piece, this all male-singing group accompanied only by

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<sup>288</sup> Hidayat, "Ideology, Sikap dan Otak," 42.

percussion is the clearest example of a rock group purposefully linking itself with the nasyid genre.

While rock artists appear to distance themselves from this style of music, especially through strong claims by groups like Bimbo and Ungu that their music is only rock and *not* nasyid (see above), “Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 and 2” is so successful in part because stylistically it staunchly affiliates itself with this genre. Dewa 19 comprehensively employs the voices of scripturalists through the text, visual symbols, and music to convey a non-conventional dakwah, inspired by Sufi Islam. In this way, this piece navigates between the two musical categories of Islamic rock and nasyid, as well as between the two ideologies of scripturalist and spiritualist Islam. Furthermore, by combining Arabic signifiers within a Western rock sound, “Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 & 2” moves past the seeming identity crisis of Islamic rock musicians, as they dually employ the voices of Western music—so often considered hostile to Islamic traditions—and a music style that is specifically associated with Islamic ritual.

### 3.8 CONCLUSION

It is difficult to assess the overall impact of Dewa 19’s music on the preaching of Islamic faith in Indonesia. By integrating Sufism and allowing it to take on a political dimension, author Rebecca Cho of the *Washington Post* suggests, “Dhani is an ambassador for peace, using his music to lead Indonesia’s youth away from radical Islam.”<sup>289</sup> Further, C. Holland Taylor asserts that the album *Laskar Cinta* is physical “proof” that Dhani has “done more to discredit radical

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<sup>289</sup> Rebecca U. Cho, “Rock Star Rattles Radical Islam,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 2006.



Islam” than any other single project on an international level.<sup>290</sup> Whether or not these very near hagiographies are verifiable, they speak to the political dimension that Dewa 19’s music has assumed, not so much in the musical works, but through the discourses upheld by the musicians, critics, and supporters of these albums.

In seeming contrast to Taylor’s claims, ethnomusicologist R. Anderson Sutton has observed that popular music in post-Suharto Indonesia has not played a significant role in creating social change in Indonesia,<sup>291</sup> which he substantiates not only through his own research, but also through the conjectures of Indonesian authors such as the playwright Putu Wijaya. He quotes Wijaya as saying, “if previously the arts were interrogated [censured], now they serve no function.”<sup>292</sup> As Sutton himself alludes to the transition from composers writing political protest music to songs of love and harmony,<sup>293</sup> I would argue that this shift is not an admission of defeat by Indonesian artists, but merely a change in tactics to achieve the same goal, that is, to build social change by sowing seeds of concord and unity amongst listeners. Or, as the lead singer Once admonishes in the final song of *Laskar Cinta*, “Let’s make harmony, for a better future.” Sutton’s conclusion emphasizes measurable change, rather than the inner spiritual change that artists such as Dewa 19 seek to construct in the listeners, and for which larger political change is necessary. As Howell has argued concerning the Sufi nature of the Islamic revival in the last decades, while these inner changes in belief are complementary with outer reform, they “may go unnoticed or be disregarded because of the polemic that surrounds them.”<sup>294</sup>

If in fact Dhani is preaching an inner spiritual revolution for his listeners, then his strategy for effecting change is not exceptionally revolutionary. He joins the substantial ranks of

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<sup>290</sup> Taylor, discussion.

<sup>291</sup> Sutton, “Reform Art,” 26.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>294</sup> Howell, “Sufism,” 702.

Indonesians who have similarly preached spiritual revivalism in the past decade, most notably members of the Muhammadiyah, which formerly was the primary critic of Sufism but has since affirmed the importance of Islam's spiritual dimension at their 1995 National Conference.<sup>295</sup>

Munir notes that inner spirituality provides students with the means "to reorient themselves to their faith by engaging with it at a deeper level."<sup>296</sup> This strategy of viewing scripturalist texts within the parameters of Sufi philosophies is in fact what characterizes Dhani's album *Laskar Cinta* and song of that same title. These works are significant, but corroborating evidence demonstrates that their philosophy is by no means unique. It is the thoroughness with which the song "Laskar Cinta, Chapters 1 & 2" unites these two strands of Indonesian Islam that makes the song a particularly skillful example of such strategies.

As in the previous chapter, whereas traditional Sufi principles may often be covertly embedded in scripturalist narratives of Islam, Dhani's treatment is more straightforward; he calls attention to his work through his rhetoric, album notes, visual aspects of performance and his own personal organizational commitments. There is perhaps a didactic element to his music, as he appropriates Sufi teachings and renovates them for popular music audiences, many of whom may be familiar with Sufi practices but possess little knowledge of the philosophical heritage underlying those traditions. In this reworking of Sufi principles, Dhani expresses spiritual unity within terms that support and advocate nationalist ideologies, as evidenced particularly in the album *Laskar Cinta*. This articulation of Sufi beliefs demonstrates that Islam is a religion of inclusion rather than exclusion, at the same time speaking to the political import of the band's music. By using the language of scripturalist Muslim groups, Dewa 19 speaks against the

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 712.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 713.

injustice of radical Islam—a system that is potentially harmful for the imaging of Indonesia as a political democracy.

The methods that Dewa 19 members use to adapt and convey Sufi principles indicates that they are politically motivated as much as they are religiously interested. As Dhani himself professes, he is a “fan of Sufism” rather than a practitioner.<sup>297</sup> Similarly, Dewa 19 cannot be identified solely as an Islamic rock group as not all the members of the band are Muslim, nor is all their music religious. Rather, their music can be viewed as an artistic model of the increasingly regular entry of Sufi principles into contemporary political discourse. The success of their works, whether or not measurable, is less important than calculating its entry within the larger trend of Indonesia’s spiritual revival, and more narrowly as indicative of the role given to Sufism in the Indonesian imagination as being a practical and functional aspect of Indonesian democratizing.

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<sup>297</sup> Hamdi and Shofwan, “Ada al-Hallaj.”

#### 4.0. ISLAMIC FUSION, CAK NUN AND KIAI KANJENG

In the mid-1990s, the Javanese writer Emha Ainun Nadjib, widely known as Cak Nun,<sup>298</sup> left his associations as a dramatist with the politically incendiary theater troupe, Dinasti, and began a music ensemble called Kiai Kanjeng that combined traditional gamelan instruments with other instruments and non-traditional music styles.<sup>299</sup> One of the founding musicians, Bobiet Santoso, recalls that the decline in “pure art” (*kesenian murni*) during the Reformation period inspired Cak Nun to create a music ensemble dedicated to performing only religious songs, or *shalawatan*.<sup>300</sup> By playing the songs that were familiar to many Indonesians through their early religious educations, Cak Nun highlighted participation rather than performance in his ensemble’s public appearances, as both audiences and artists could sing and pray together. The group played wherever they were invited, sometimes unpaid, and often traveling deep into conflict areas where their music had an immediately calming effect on their audiences. As the ensemble grew in number, they began to attract famous singers and political activists who sensed

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<sup>298</sup> It is common for prominent Indonesians to be given smaller, more manageable nicknames by their followers. Cak is Eastern Javanese for “older brother,” while Nun is from the latter syllable of his second name, Ainun. The name Cak Nun often causes confusion with those who are newer to his circle, as it is often mistaken for the nickname of the prominent Islamic intellectual Nurcholish Madjid, also known as Cak Nur.

<sup>299</sup> The name Kiai Kanjeng consists of two titles: the first is that given to a Muslim teacher and the second a Javanese prince or nobleman. As will be discussed later, the name is derived from one of Cak Nun’s plays and is actually that of the gamelan instruments. It has since become synonymous with the name of the musical group.

<sup>300</sup> Bobiet Santoso (musician and arranger, Kiai Kanjeng), interview with the author, Surakarta, August, 27, 2007.

the importance of Kiai Kanjeng's work, not only for their artistic merits, but also as social advocates.<sup>301</sup>

The significance of Kiai Kanjeng during these years lay in the fluidity of the band's performance structure, as they seamlessly shifted between the music of the band members, the spiritually and politically insightful voice of Cak Nun, and the voices of the audience members. The combination of these three elements created an innovative performance style based on traditional theatrical styles, which inspired a unique forum for political and cultural dialogue through audience participation.

Since the formation of Kiai Kanjeng, many ensembles have emerged in their likeness, especially in East Java where many of the members originate. Some of these, like the children's ensemble in figure 33, also take the name "Kiai," alternatively spelled *kyai*, as their ensemble name, a word that refers to the title of a Muslim teacher and leader of Indonesian pesantren. The members of Kiai Kanjeng chose the name "Kiai" as the name of their set of gamelan instruments, indicating, it would seem, that the musical instruments themselves are the teachers and source of Islamic knowledge. Only afterwards did the name of the instruments become synonymous with the name of the music ensemble.

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 33. Children's gamelan ensemble, Jombang, 2005**

Part of the distinction between Kiai Kanjeng and the derivative groups that share their name is the personal charisma of Cak Nun and the ensuing devotion of his surrounding community. Musicians of Kiai Kanjeng and devotees alike describe Cak Nun as a father, friend and teacher,<sup>302</sup> and during musical performances a perceptible kinship emerges between audience members and musicians. These analogies and the religious revivalist format of their performances evince recognizable elements of Javanese mysticism,<sup>303</sup> even if overt claims of mysticism are minimized. Despite the symbiosis achieved in performances between Kiai Kanjeng and Cak Nun—for one could not survive in its present format without the other—Cak Nun is undeniably the spiritual and musical leader of the ensemble. It is this collaboration

<sup>302</sup> Ian L Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha* (Jakarta: Penerbit Kompas, 2006), 1-32. An English-language edition of Betts book is forthcoming. This work gathers together more complete accolades revealing these familial and student-teacher relationships between his followers and Cak Nun. For example, Kiai Kanjeng musician Pak Is simply describes Cak Nun as “Ulama, Bapak dan teman saya” (my religious teacher, father and my friend).

<sup>303</sup> For a discussion of Javanese mysticism, see Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), 331-2.

between his philosophical positions and the musical output of Kiai Kanjeng that will be the focus of this chapter.

Scholar of Indonesian literature Harry Aveling describes Cak Nun as a new Sufi intellectual, inclined towards Javanese spirituality, and representative of “a new type of Muslim leadership, both intellectual and traditional.” These leaders are “respected by mass constituencies... [through] their speaking and writing” rather than through high ranking positions in the government or Islamic associations.<sup>304</sup> Kiai Kanjeng’s innovative spiritual and musical performances participate in a global revival of Sufi expression that is often characterized in Indonesia by a “modification of traditional Sufi practices and institutions” conveyed through “large gatherings, loosely networked together, with highly egalitarian relationships among participants.”<sup>305</sup> Consistent with Javanese mysticism, Cak Nun emphasizes an Islamic faith that is relativistic; that is, each individual must follow his or her own inner spirituality.<sup>306</sup>

One of Kiai Kanjeng’s most significant roles in the Indonesian Sufi revival has been their arrangement and interpretation of traditional folk songs as first and foremost Sufi texts, allegedly written by Javanese saints in the fifteenth century. Through the accompanying rhetoric of Cak Nun, the ensemble invests these tunes with new meaning—or as Cak Nun prefers, reinvests them with their original meaning<sup>307</sup>—in a way that demonstrates both spiritual and political awareness. Their method of interpretation derives from traditional Javanese philology, which allows ancient Javanese texts to have contemporary relevance through the suppression of a linear historiography. As Nancy Florida suggests, an active reading of historic texts has the ability to

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<sup>304</sup> Harry Aveling, *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry, 1966-1998* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2001), 232-3.

<sup>305</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001), 719.

<sup>306</sup> Geertz, *Religion of Java*, 336.

<sup>307</sup> “I think the author, the one who created it [the song], was ‘sengaja’ [deliberate]; they themselves have an interpretation like that...” Emha Ainun Nadjib [Cak Nun], in discussion with the author, August 2007. (This interview was given partly in English).

transform them from something long forgotten into potential “contexts for change.”<sup>308</sup> This chapter will examine the ways that meaning is constructed in these Javanese tunes in order to allow Cak Nun’s philosophical and political messages to emerge. Through this analysis, I will identify some of the implications for Sufi spirituality in Indonesia’s Islamic revival, and highlight some ways that Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng use their musical performances to create sites of political activism.

#### 4.1 CAK NUN AND ISLAM IN JAVA

Cak Nun claims no titles but is varyingly known throughout many parts of Indonesia as a poet, essayist, philosopher, Muslim intellectual and holy teacher, political visionary, musician, and playwright. The Javanese Islamic leader KH A. Mustofa Bisri best summarizes the elusiveness of Cak Nun’s identity when he writes:

Pasti banyak orang yang merasa kenal dengan Cak Nun...tapi seberapa banyak orang yang benar-benar mengenalnya? Santri tanpa sarung; haji tanpa peci; kiai tanpa sorban; dai tanpa mimbar; mursyid tanpa tarekat; sarjana tanpa wisuda; guru tanpa sekolahan; aktivis tanpa LSM; pendemo tanpa spanduk; politisi tanpa partai; wakil rakyat tanpa dewan; pemberontak tanpa senjata; ksatria tanpa kuda; saudara tanpa hubungan darah.

[Everyone thinks they know Cak Nun...But how many people actually do? He is a Muslim student without his robes, one who has gone to Mecca but doesn’t wear the hat, a Muslim leader without his turban, a teacher without a platform, a student of the Sufi Path without belonging to an order, a man of degrees without ever graduating, a teacher without any schooling, an activist without an institution, a demonstrator without a cause, a politician without a party, a representative of the people without an office, a foot soldier without a weapon, a warrior without a horse, a brother without any blood relation.]<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 51.

<sup>309</sup> Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, 25.



Because Cak Nun is difficult to define and his importance is recognized locally in Indonesia, he is commonly described through two titles: 1) *kiai mbeling* (unconventional Muslim leader); and 2) *budayawan* (cultural expert). Even with a certain amount of exposition, neither label is particularly helpful. The first can be understood partly through journalist Christopher Torchia's text on colloquial Indonesian, in which he uses Cak Nun in his definition of the word *kiai mbeling*. Torchia describes Cak Nun as an "off-beat, off the wall Muslim leader" because of his unusual writing style, his indirect criticisms of the government, and his personal penchant for Western clothing and long hair, instead of the "traditional, flowing tunics" worn by most Muslim teachers.<sup>310</sup> Former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid explains the equally widespread classification of Cak Nun as a cultural expert by depicting him as someone who "mencari inovasi dalam karya-karya tradisional" (seeks innovation through traditional compositions)<sup>311</sup> since his creative output is often based in traditional Javanese forms. Cak Nun contests both of these titles, saying that accepting either only inflates him with importance while at the same time allowing everyone, himself included, to avoid responsibility for his actions, since ultimately these titles have little meaning. In an essay entitled "Tombo Ati: di Era Su'udhdhan" (Heart Medicine: in the Era of Prejudice) Cak Nun writes that the only label he accepts is that of *khalifullah*, meaning the purveyor of God's word, which according to the Qur'an is an appropriate title for all Muslims.<sup>312</sup>

Whatever title given to him, Cak Nun has courted the Indonesian public eye since the 1990s through his critical expostulation of national policy, often in relation to Islam. Part of his

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<sup>310</sup> Christopher Torchia, *Indonesian Idioms and Expressions: Colloquial Indonesians at Work* (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2007), 47. Incidentally, Torchia defines *mbeling* as a "crude Javanese term for naughty."

<sup>311</sup> Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, 12.

<sup>312</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib, *Mata Ketawa Cara: Refot-nasi* (Yogyakarta: Zaituna Yogyakarta, 1998), 86-7.

importance as a Muslim leader can be understood through his personal history,<sup>313</sup> which positions him as what Benedict Anderson dubbed a “wild, rural *kyai*,” a Muslim leader whose power derived from maintaining his distance from central politics and whose intervention signaled a period of social upheaval.<sup>314</sup> His life experiences facilitated the conditions to develop a political vision based upon the incorporation of Indonesian mystic traditions within contemporary politics, which will be more fully revealed through an analysis of his musical compositions.

Cak Nun’s early schooling provided him with a rigorous Islamic education, even though he did not always conform to the school’s policies. Born the fourth of fifteen children, in the village of Menturo, East Jombang in 1953, his primary education was at the East Javanese pesantren Tebu Ireng, followed by several years at the acclaimed secondary pesantren Gontor, where he began extensive training in the Qur’an and Arabic. He transferred in his third year, compelled by his family to finish his degree in the Central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, at a high school administrated by Muhammadiyah.<sup>315</sup>

These early years provided Cak Nun with a working knowledge of the two main Islamic institutions in Indonesia. Jombang has long been considered the seat of Nahdatul Ulama, an organization renowned for its adherence to the views of traditional Javanese Muslims and its promise to work for the economic development of rural communities. Jombang was the birthplace of many NU scholars and politicians including former president Abdurrahman Wahid. Cak Nun’s primary school, Tebu Ireng, was especially significant to NU, because it was

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<sup>313</sup> Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, 12.

<sup>314</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Jakarta: First Equinox Edition, 2006), 64.

<sup>315</sup> Cak Nun, discussion, 2007.

established by NU's founder, KH M. Hasyim Asy'ari, who is buried on the campus grounds.<sup>316</sup>

NU was established initially in response to modernist Muslim organizations, including Indonesia's second largest such civil institution, Muhammadiyah, whose followers sought to separate Islamic practice from long-standing Javanese traditions. By finishing his secondary education at a Muhammadiyah school, Cak Nun was exposed to both civil institutions, and despite speculations to the contrary, he uses this background as credence that he belongs to neither organization, though he fully understands the philosophical underpinnings of each.<sup>317</sup>

After finishing high school, Cak Nun briefly studied economics at the University of Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta before dropping out after only four months. His real education, he says, began on the streets of Malioboro, a neighborhood in Yogyakarta, where he met the only man he acknowledges as his teacher, a Sufi itinerant named Umbu Landu Paranggi.<sup>318</sup> Today, Malioboro is a famous shopping district, but during the 1970s, it had greater significance as an artist's colony where philosophy and creative expression intermingled through a bohemian lifestyle.

Cak Nun's intuitive learning on the streets of Malioboro with a recognized Sufi places him within Indonesia's Islamic mystic tradition, which has its roots in Java's pre-Islamic traditions chronicled in the literature of Javanese drama.<sup>319</sup> He has been likened to the Javanese character Semar,<sup>320</sup> the wise clown inserted into the Indian epic stories. Semar is a Javanese addition to the Hindu epics that both represents God in earthly form and offers astute commentary on the drama through simple, lowbrow entertainment. Traditionally, a Semar figure is seen as needed to herald a spiritual return to governance in Indonesia.

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<sup>316</sup> Ainur R. Sophiaan, "Gus Dur Amidst the Pluralistic 'Pesantren' Chain," *Jakarta Post*, November 1, 1999.

<sup>317</sup> Cak Nun, discussion, 2007.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Anderson, *Language and Power*, 62.

<sup>320</sup> Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, 14.

Cak Nun acts as a living Semar through his concise criticisms of the national government, as he works to expose its insufficiencies to the Indonesian people in inventive ways. Through the milieu of Malioboro, Cak Nun associated himself with local theater groups, especially Dinasti, where he co-authored several plays that illuminated the government's abuse of political power over the Indonesian citizenry. Predictably, local government prevented some of these plays from being performed. He also directly participated in political institutions in order to expose them as puppet organizations, dedicated to creating propaganda rather than lasting change.<sup>321</sup>

Benedict Anderson maintains that the power of a government critic is fundamentally derived from his distance from the central authority, and in accordance with this theory Cak Nun abandoned direct participation in the government, instead favoring the arts as his primary outlet for criticism.<sup>322</sup> He further maintained his distance from the nation's capital geographically, living in Europe and America for a short time in the late 1980s before choosing the Javanese center of Yogyakarta as his permanent residence. As Anderson might have predicted, by being an outsider Cak Nun is often viewed as a more authentic representative of the people; he has thus been able to participate as a mediator between the government and the Indonesian disenfranchised especially during periods of national crisis. For example, during the hot mud eruptions in East Java in 2006, Cak Nun acted as a mediator between the national government and the victims whose homes had been destroyed. He helped determine the property value of the victims and the amount of compensation each family received and ensured that the process

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<sup>321</sup> Robert Hefner explains how Cak Nun tested government organizations through his involvement with the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) in December 1990. Cak Nun organized a forum to discuss the ramifications of a proposed dam that threatened to relocate thousands of farmers. When higher-ups forced Cak Nun to cancel the event, hoping to prevent controversial attention being given to the project, the limits of ICMI independence were revealed. Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 139.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 155.

occurred in a timely manner. Though he has no specific training in such negotiations, both parties trusted Cak Nun as a spiritual and community leader and had faith that he would represent their viewpoints accurately.

## **4.2 KIAI KANJENG AND THE PLACE OF MUSIC WITHIN THE RHETORIC OF CAK NUN**

The performance ensemble Kiai Kanjeng was initially created from the musicians that accompanied Cak Nun's theatrical and poetry performances in the 1980s. The name derives from Cak Nun's play "Pak Kanjeng" (Mr. Respected), which narrates a tale of protest against a dictating authority. In the play, the only person who is successful in opposing the tyrant is a commoner named Pak Kanjeng, rather than members of the elite ruling class.<sup>323</sup> The play was accompanied by gamelan. After the success of the play, as it is traditional for a collection of gamelan instruments to be given a name, the gamelan was christened Kiai Kanjeng, though almost immediately the name of the gamelan became confused with that of the ensemble. The modification of the word "Pak" (Mister, or father) to "kiai" (religious teacher)<sup>324</sup> alerts the listener the potential Muslim spiritual role of the group.

That "kanjeng" literally means "respected" is ironic, given that the original character, Pak Kanjeng, epitomizes an average person who typically would not be accorded much honor. In essence, the title is an attempt to return the esteem back to the common Indonesian and away from an oppressive elite. By referencing the play, the members of the ensemble indicate that

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<sup>323</sup> Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, x.

<sup>324</sup> "Kiai" can alternatively be spelled "kyai." As it is the title of respect given to religious experts and leaders, especially of traditional Muslim schools, the name Kiai Kanjeng literally means "the respected religious teacher."

their aim is not to be extraordinary, but rather ordinary Javanese citizens, who strive to achieve social change by bringing together people of varying cultural, social, and economic classes. In their official promotional material, the musicians endorse this “every man” rhetoric, stating: “Not a single person in the group...considers themselves [to be] a musician. They see music as a tool that connects people. In their own expression, music [is] meant to be a journey, not a destination.”<sup>325</sup> This stance is conveyed during their performances by allowing audience members to participate on stage in sharing music, dance, ideas, and anecdotes. However, despite their promotional rhetoric, all of the performers are indeed very competent musicians; some teach music professionally in Central Java, while others are regular participants in acclaimed musical events such as the annual Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival that attracts musicians internationally.

Kiai Kanjeng consists of fifteen musicians who perform a variety of instruments, including but not limited to a diatonically tuned gamelan, flute, drums, violin, flute, keyboard, and electric guitar and bass. Their repertoire references a variety of music genres, including jazz, blues, rock, gospel, Arabic and Javanese music. In addition to original compositions, they also perform contemporary music hits in any of the above genres, such as Cat Steven’s “Wild World,” or Josh Grobin’s “You Raise Me Up.” In general, the compositions are conceived of by Cak Nun and arranged by the musicians.

Four main performance formats characterize Kiai Kanjeng concerts: 1) dramatic and/or poetic accompaniment; 2) purely music concerts; 3) religious revivalist performances; and 4) community action events. In each of these formats Cak Nun acts as the ensemble’s director both musically and spiritually. At every concert he is liable to extemporize at length, providing

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<sup>325</sup> Sabrang Mowo Damar Panuluh, “Crossing the Border of Traditional Gamelan,” Programme Book, Indonesian Embassy, November 2004.

supplemental discourse to the music (see figure 34). As keyboardist and drummer Bobiet Santoso recalls from their tour in Italy in 2005, the musicians deemed Cak Nun to be appropriately titled “maestro,” despite his inability to play music. He is a maestro, “tidak hanya watak aransemen dan wilayah notasinya, tapi juga segala pertimbangan sosial yang melatarbelakangi lahirnya musik-musik Kiai Kanjeng” (beyond merely arranging and notating music, but rather through his consideration of the social conditions that birthed Kiai Kanjeng’s music).<sup>326</sup> In addition to his spoken contribution, Cak Nun often leads sung Islamic prayers or sings his own poetry. More rarely, he sings a composition written by somebody else, such as John Lennon’s “Imagine.”



**Figure 34. Cak Nun joking during performance with Kiai Kanjeng musicians**

During a performance, each of the different elements carefully evokes syncretic images for the audience. Performers in Javanese dress may be juxtaposed with those in Indonesian Muslim dress. Sets might resemble the interior of a Middle Eastern mosque, but be imbued with traditional *wayang* (puppet theater) imagery, including specifically Javanese characters like the

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<sup>326</sup> Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, 20.

god-clown Semar.<sup>327</sup> The instrumental arrangements blend European-American, Chinese,<sup>328</sup> Middle-Eastern, and indigenous Indonesian instruments into one musical piece. Stylistically, the compositions encompass local and foreign elements: regionally comprising gamelan, kroncong, campursari, and dangdut, while drawing on international elements again from the Middle East, China, Europe and America.<sup>329</sup> Some of these syncretic combinations have proven to be controversial, such as the linguistic fusion of Arabic and Javanese that often occurs in the same song.<sup>330</sup> However, by referencing many musical languages in these multiple ways, Kiai Kanjeng reaches a broad audience, bringing in listeners who might not otherwise be inspired to listen to a purely Islamic music group.

The genre of music in which Kiai Kanjeng writes has been described in a variety of ways, including national music<sup>331</sup> which references the band's potential to reach out to cross-segments of the Indonesian population and "gamelan dakwah" (preaching gamelan), which describes the band's ability to speak directly to the role of Islam in contemporary cultural life.<sup>332</sup> While these terms are both appropriate, each suggests only one ideological aim of the band such as cultural plurality or religious preaching. Kiai Kanjeng strives to move beyond genre, through the myriad functions they assume in their variety of performance styles. While gamelan fusion is far from an ideal descriptor because of the term's ambiguity, like Cak Nun the band effectively avoids categorical definition as they continually adjust their music to the needs of their audiences.

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<sup>327</sup> Franki Notosudirdjo, "Kyai Kanjeng: Islam and the Search for National Music in Indonesia," *The World of Music* 45, no. 2 (2003), 44.

<sup>328</sup> The inclusion of Chinese musical styles is important, because historically the Chinese have been subject to much discrimination in Indonesia, especially in recent years. For further reading, see Chang-Yau Hoon, "Reconceptualising Ethnic Chinese Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia" (PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2007).

<sup>329</sup> Notosudirdjo, "Kyai Kanjeng," 44.

<sup>330</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen, "The Arab Musical Aesthetic in Indonesian Islam," *The World of Music* 47, no. 1 (2005), 84. She writes that "Although the local music and language may have the power to speak to the *orang kecil* (regular folk), perhaps Arabic language and the musical language of the Arab world seem to be considered more appropriate for the expression of a global Islam by Emha's critics."

<sup>331</sup> Notosudirdjo, "Kyai Kanjeng," 44.

<sup>332</sup> Rasmussen, "Arab Musical Aesthetic," 82.



Often, these factors are determined at each show by the particular structure of the performance.<sup>333</sup>

The term gamelan fusion aptly characterizes the syncretic nature of Kiai Kanjeng's music. Like the variety of world music groups appearing with increasing frequency throughout Java,<sup>334</sup> Kiai Kanjeng joins together several distinctive styles into one integrated musical experience. In the case of Kiai Kanjeng, the three broad styles include Western popular music, Arabic Islam, and regional Javanese. While other elements occur, such as the occasional reference to Chinese music or Christian music, these three musical languages are given equal prominence. Ideologically, however, the main musical element seems to be the Javanese, as the name of the ensemble is actually that of the gamelan instruments. In this way, the regional is given added significance; despite its stylistic voicing through the dominant hegemonic discourses in Indonesia, it is never merely being exhibited as a lifeless cultural curiosity.

In Cak Nun's extemporaneous speeches during music performances, he relates his discussions of Islam to the accompanying music through three main ways: 1) as an aid in creating a prayerful environment; 2) for audience entertainment, often providing a break between more serious discussions; and 3) as a didactic device, frequently used ironically to expose ideological inconsistency. While the first two aims are self-explanatory, the third element requires more explanation.

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<sup>333</sup> In one instance during my fieldwork in 2007, I attended three rehearsals where Kiai Kanjeng was readying a particularly critical music drama about corruption in the Indonesian banking system. However, when they arrived at the performance venue (which was at the Yogyakarta Keraton, or Sultan's palace), Cak Nun thought the environment was far too lighthearted and festive for such a work. Without any announcement to the musicians, he informed the audience that they would be performing a "greatest hits" style concert and Kiai Kanjeng abandoned the drama for the evening and played only their standard musical repertoire.

<sup>334</sup> Take, for example, the prolific work of Sundanese music group Sambasumba, which has performed regionally and internationally. Though they are not a religious group per se, they have produced several albums that contain Muslim and Arabic subtexts. Like many world music groups, their musical language draws from a variety of cultural sources, including regional Sundanese, Western pop music styles, and even West African drumming.

One of Cak Nun's oft-told stories is his tale of meeting Yusuf Islam, formerly Cat Stevens, during his 2003 trip to England. According to Cak Nun, at the time, the former pop singer was taking a hiatus from his own music career following his conversion to Islam, as many understandings of Islam regard music as *haram*, or prohibited. In Cak Nun's recollection, after attending one of Kiai Kanjeng's concerts and speaking with the musicians, Yusuf Islam recognized the potential that music has in preaching the message of Islam.

As Cak Nun often says, music performance is neither inherently good nor bad. It is an unbiased tool, without adherence to a particular ideology, or possession of any innate qualities. In an illustration that is often uncomfortable for his Muslim audience members, Kiai Kanjeng will sometimes perform the Christmas song "Silent Night" but insert the words to a common Muslim prayer, "Shalawat Badar": "Sholatulloh, Salamulloh..." In this way, he demonstrates that the music itself can be freed from its cultural associations and take on new meaning as a "truly Islamic song." Audience reaction is often quite mixed to this type of teaching. At one performance I witnessed, at a poetry event in Yogyakarta 2005, the Kiai Kanjeng vocalist Mas Seteng (Agus Yuniawan) asked the ensemble to play a "truly Islamic song" during a comedic skit. When the band began playing "Silent Night," the crowd erupted in laughter. However, at another event in Banjarmasin, when the focus was on Cak Nun preaching, only a few audience members laughed and many appeared to me to be visibly uncomfortable.

In talking about music, Cak Nun observes that like all aspects of life, music must be approached with thoughtfulness and care. For example, it is not appropriate for a rock band to perform inside a mosque, a place dedicated solely for worship. He also cautions musicians to

approach their craft with wisdom, neither expecting adulation from their fans, nor worshipping their own music predecessors as false idols. Such veneration should only be accorded God.<sup>335</sup>

One of the other lessons that Kiai Kanjeng helps demonstrate through their musical repertoire is aimed at revealing the inadequacy of scripturalist Islam as it is often practiced in Indonesia. Cak Nun will ask the ensemble to play an Arabic-language song, often performed by his wife Novia Kolopaking (famous in her own right as a singer and actress).<sup>336</sup> Only after the audience reacts in a favorable manner does Cak Nun reveal that the piece is originally Christian. In a culture that can be almost allergic to ecumenical practice (one friend from Bandung told me that her mother refused to allow a Bible to even enter her home, let alone for her to read it; Muslims and Christians are often wary of even entering each other's houses of worship), this particular example is often offensive to the audience members, especially since the piece has already succeeded in repositioning them into a worshipful space. This teaching tactic illustrates that according reverence to cultural elements from the Middle East without proper understanding may have alarming consequences, including bordering on idolatry. Speaking in Arabic or donning Muslim clothing does not necessarily mean that someone is more religious than another who chooses Javanese clothing and language. Cak Nun eases his audience's frustration by returning power to them through their freedom of choice, and away from charlatan leaders who preach rote adherence to tradition without understanding. He reminds his followers that they can be discerning Muslims who seek intellectual and spiritual understanding rather than merely accepting the visual and aural symbols of religiosity. In these ways, music assumes a full role in

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<sup>335</sup> Kiai Kanjeng, *Teori Silingkuh: Dzikir, Shalawat & Puisi Bersama Maysarakat Banjarmasin*, Progress (video compact disc, ca. 2007). Includes partial video for the event that occurred that evening.

<sup>336</sup> Cak Nun's wife, Novia, plays an important administrative role in his work, in addition to sharing her skills as a performer. Now when she performs, she veils and is at ease bantering with audience.

Cak Nun's teaching method, and allows equal participation between his rhetoric, the musicians, and the audience.

### 4.3 INTERPRETING THE UN-INTERPRETABLE

Through their music, Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng participate in an ongoing revival that began in the 1970s that in part has it aims to rescue Islamic spirituality from the numerous mystic cults that may share similar practices, but have otherwise divorced themselves from a wholly Muslim foundation. These groups proliferated in number during the early twentieth century and some even demanded recognition by the Indonesian government as new religions.<sup>337</sup> Because of their deeply eclectic philosophic foundation borrowing from both Christian and Indic theosophy, these groups were highly repugnant to most Islamic reformists, who criticized them as being polytheistic, and oftentimes no longer identifiable as Muslim.<sup>338</sup> The Sufi revival in Indonesia in which Cak Nun contributes serves to return the spirituality maintained by many of the practices of these cults within the basic structure of Islam.

In her book on the reading of Javanese classic literature, anthropologist Nancy Florida also isolates these two trends in Indonesian mysticism, as she differentiates between the Indonesian Sufi texts of historic Java and the copious theosophical groups that revere them as symbols of Javanese culture.<sup>339</sup> Most members of these cults idealize historic Javanese writings as belonging to a perfect past and believe that knowledge can be derived from the close study of these texts, as well as the Islamic mystical songs that were supposedly authored by Javanese

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<sup>337</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia, ca. 1300 to the present*, 3rd ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>338</sup> Howell, "Sufism," 707.

<sup>339</sup> Florida, *Writing the Past*, 33.

saints.<sup>340</sup> However, despite the urgings of the authors to return to these marginalized texts and approach them day and night with an attentive and contemplative heart, the works themselves are rarely read. Instead, cult members imagine these texts to be so profound that they are virtually incomprehensible to the uninitiated reader.<sup>341</sup> Heeding the plea of one of these authors, Florida offers her own reading and interpretation of one of these long-forgotten texts, and in so doing finds that her interpretation allows her to engage with both the past and present. Through a “historical conversation” with the author, she speculates about how the interpretation of the past by the author has relevance for envisioning the future.<sup>342</sup>

Through this process of creation and interpretation, a similarity emerges between her work and that of Cak Nun, as he selects Javanese folk songs for his gamelan ensemble. While some of his compositions are originally children’s songs, many are credited as being written by early Islamic saints and leaders and thought to contain profound but long-forgotten meaning. Through the musical performance and Cak Nun’s subsequent rhetoric, Kiai Kanjeng engages in a practice of critical reading that is similar to the subject of Florida’s book. While neither he nor Florida belong to this mystical cult that reveres historic texts as cultural icons, they are responding to the same premises. Through their deliberation, both authors give credence to the supposition that these texts are intrinsically significant as they attempt to unravel the latent meaning that was once imagined as defying understanding.

Cak Nun’s choice of children’s songs as the object of his interpretation is a purposeful decision rather than the result of his unfamiliarity with more serious Javanese literature. Indeed, in 1989 he published his own Indonesian-language translation of Islamic mystical songs, of the type commonly performed in traditional theater genres (*suluk*). However, his selection of

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 6.

children's songs ensures that at least some of his works will be immediately familiar to his audiences, many of whom grew up singing these poems.

It has become increasingly common since the 1990s for secular rock groups to sing traditional pesantren songs. For example, in 2002 the popular rock group Gigi created an Islamic music album titled *Kembalinya* (The Return) with the goal of helping young adults—many of whom did not grow up in Islamic schools, or who preferred secular music over what they deemed to be “less fashionable” Islamic songs—learn to value these songs again. With the exception of Bimbo's “Tuhan,” which had partly served as an inspiration for their album (see Chapter 2) and one original composition, Gigi's first religious album, purposefully contained only covers of these traditional songs, to facilitate the revival of these songs. The band members collaborated to select the songs that they found most meaningful as young Muslims, and performed them in the style of rock compositions.<sup>343</sup>

While most of the “traditional” songs that contemporary bands perform are thought to be very old, many have a much more recent history than listeners imagine. As bands perform them, their concern over intellectual property rights helps reveal the song's actual origins. One of the songs Gigi recorded on the album *Kembalinya* is “Perdamaian” (Peace), which the lead singer, Armand had learned growing up in West Java. According to his research, Armand discovered that the song was attributed to an Abu Ali Haydat, but that he had sold the rights many years ago. Still wishing to recognize and compensate the author, the Gigi bandmembers advertised their desire to credit the composer, should he still be alive, via celebrity television programming. Through this endeavor, they discovered that Abu Ali Haydat was really the composer's son, who eventually came forward to share his family's story with Gigi band members. As fellow musicians, Gigi band members place value on acknowledging and compensating the original

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<sup>343</sup> Armand Maulana (lead singer, Gigi), in discussion with the author, July 2007.

composers, and they were successful in obtaining the necessary permission for covering each work in their first religious album.<sup>344</sup>

By arranging traditional songs and giving them the chance “menjadi hits lagi” (to become hits again),<sup>345</sup> music groups effectually allow the traditional to become modern. As an increasing number of Indonesian’s youths attend secular schools, many young people are not even familiar with these “traditional” songs. Sometimes, contemporary audiences believe that the new music groups are indeed the original composers of the traditional. Even when considering Gigi’s careful efforts described above, Cak Nun held the band responsible for misleading audiences in this way. Preaching before an audience in Banjarmasin, Kalimantan, Cak Nun suggested that most listeners believed the song “Perdamaian” to be written by Gigi, which he demonstrated by polling his audience, asking for the name of the composer. When a large percentage of the audience shouted “Gigi!,” Cak Nun elucidated the actual history, which seemed to surprise his listeners. It is evident from discussions with the lead singer of Gigi, Armand, that the band had no intention of deceiving their audiences into believing that they had composed these religious songs; they can only be faulted for perhaps succeeding a little too well in their main objective, which was to assist in re-popularizing these songs. However, this story demonstrates the prime importance that Cak Nun places in educating the public about Indonesian and local traditions. For Cak Nun, it is not enough to re-popularize the older songs, but also to make their histories known, so innovation is achieved through tradition, rather than trading in the old with something new, modern, or foreign.

Gigi’s story contrasts with the strategy of Cak Nun, whose rhetoric accompanying his music performances occupies an equal position with the music itself. What differentiates Kiai

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> “Ide dasarnya, main basic-nya itu, pingin membawa lagu-lagu yang dulu, itu menjadi hits lagi” (The basic idea was that we wanted to bring back the older songs, so that they could become hits again). Ibid.

Kanjeng from other groups is not so much their performance repertoire, or the originality of their musical arrangements. Instead, it is the power and influence of Cak Nun's interpretation. Often, these philosophies are not readily apparent from the music alone, but once Cak Nun's theological and political interpretation is revealed, the pieces take on new musical meaning.

Cak Nun's position on basing contemporary art in local traditions can be viewed partly within the Javanese conception of authorship, in which "author" or "composer" carries a slightly different set of connotations than in Western cultures. A composer need not be responsible for creativity, but instead may be someone who simply copies texts, like a scribe, or one who recombines and adapts traditional texts within a new format.<sup>346</sup> An arranger, therefore, is viewed equally to be a creator and carries the same power as an author. Words in Java are powerful.<sup>347</sup> The traditional is especially imagined to be beyond comprehension, despite a general consensus that such words contain the secrets to "life's deepest mysteries"; even if they were to be understood, the reader would only recognize that they are "so profound as to be beyond discursive comprehension."<sup>348</sup> By creating a foundation for his creativity within the traditional, Cak Nun accesses these conventional devices and gives power to both his spoken and musical words.

Members of his community often acknowledge their own inability to understand Cak Nun's words, in effect further advocating him as a spiritual leader. Several times, my research assistants would confide in me when I would ask them to define a particular word or phrase: "It is not because of your language comprehension that you can't understand Cak Nun. He is very difficult to understand even for me." While there may be many layers of meaning surrounding his dialogues, I believe that it is partly their attempt to proffer him with additional power that

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<sup>346</sup> Florida, *Writing the Past*, 19.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 39.



followers deem Cak Nun to be so difficult to understand. By asserting his incomprehensibility, his followers are supporting their own affirmations that Cak Nun is a mystical prophet, what some call the tenth *wali* (saint).<sup>349</sup>

#### 4.4 MUSICAL EXEGESIS

In this section, I would like to examine two pieces of music that Kiai Kanjeng has arranged and that have been popularly received in Indonesia, “Ilir-Ilir” and “Gundul Pacul.” Both are Javanese children’s songs. Musically, these pieces reveal a synthesis between traditional and modern; rhetorically, Cak Nun’s philosophies indicate a level of textual analysis that inherently draws on indigenous Sufi principles.

“Ilir-Ilir & Shalawat Badar” was written in 1997, and arranged by the Kiai Kanjeng musician, Bobiet Santoso. This song has been one of the ensemble’s most successful pieces, achieving scholarly attention internationally and locally.<sup>350</sup> Bobiet remembers the compositional process as being “extraordinary” and “inspired,”<sup>351</sup> serving to imbue the song with almost a spiritual mandate from its conception.<sup>352</sup>

“Ilir-Ilir” has a long history in the Javanese gamelan repertoire. While there are multiple stories of the song’s origins, it is most commonly attributed to the Javanese saint Sunan Ampel, one of the nine responsible for bringing Islam to Indonesia. In his writing, Cak Nun clearly

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<sup>349</sup> Rasmussen, “Arab Musical Aesthetic,” 84.

<sup>350</sup> Rasmussen, “Arab Musical Aesthetic,” 2005. She also discusses “Ilir-Ilir” in her article.

<sup>351</sup> Bobiet relates the compositional process as occurring in under twelve hours. Cak Nun approached him with the idea late in the evening, and Bobiet only began working on the piece at midnight. The piece was practiced and ready for recording by early morning. Bobiet, conversation.

<sup>352</sup> View “Ilir-Ilir” via Youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToOXG2Es234> (accessed July 14, 2010).

accepts this narrative of the song's genesis, believing that the lyrics convey essential wisdom from the saint to contemporary Indonesian generations.

Kanjeng Sunan Ampel seakan-akan baru hari ini bertutur. Kepada kita. Tentang kita. Tentang segala sesuatu yang kita mengalaminya sendiri. Namun tak kunjung sanggup kita mengerti. Sejak lima abad silam syair itu ia telah lantunkan. Dan tak ada jaminan bahwa sekarang kita bisa paham. Padahal kata-kata itu mengeja kehidupan kita sendiri.

[It is as if the respected Sunan Ampel is speaking anew today. For us. About us. About everything that we experience individually. Yet we are never able to understand. The poetry of "Ilir-Ilir" has reverberated throughout the past five centuries. And there is no guarantee that we can now understand it. Although truly, these words spell out our own lives.]<sup>353</sup>

The lyrics, he believes, contain a powerful message, with "prophetic" consequences that Ampel attempts to communicate to Javanese Indonesians, providing they can interpret his words. As is so often suggested of his own writing, Cak Nun implies that the deep wisdom in the saint's song also renders it almost impossible to understand.

"Ilir-Ilir & Shalawat Badar" is a tripartite arrangement of three poems: 1) the Javanese text of "Ilir-Ilir," set to a variation of its originally melody, 2) a short prayer in Arabic, written by Cak Nun and performed in an Arabic mode,<sup>354</sup> and 3) the popular Arabic-language song, "Shalawat Badar," set to the returning melody of "Ilir-Ilir." Musically, the form (described in more detail in Table 3) could be written as: [I] A B [I] A' A Coda.

**Table 3. Form of "Ilir-Ilir," performed by Kiai Kanjeng**

Section	Duration	Tempo	Lyricist	Arrangement
I	36 seconds	quarter note=56	N/A	Instrumental
A	90 seconds	quarter note=144	Sunan Ampel (attributed)	Choir with accompaniment
B	75 seconds	Unmetered	Cak Nun	Cak Nun with limited accompaniment

<sup>353</sup> Emha, *Mata Ketawa Cara*, 92.

<sup>354</sup> Rasmussen, "Arab Musical Aesthetic," 82. She identifies the singing style as a Mawwal, and the mode as maqam Nakriz.

I	22 seconds	quarter note=36	N/A	Instrumental
A'	90 seconds	quarter note=144	Sunan Ampel (attributed)	Cak Nun, Choir
A	90 seconds	quarter note=144	Sunan Ampel (attributed)	Choir with accompaniment
Coda	36 seconds	quarter note=56	Sunan Ampel (attributed)	Choir with accompaniment

The short instrumental introduction and interlude (I in the table) introduces a repeating ostinato figure in the diatonically tuned gamelan. The A section presents the diatonic melodic version of the traditional tune “Ilir-Ilir”; when it is transformed in the A' section, the lyrics are that of “Shalawat Badar,” but retain the same melodic structure of the A section. The B section presents new melodic material in a brief, unmetered and improvisational style, for solo singer and synthesized drone. The coda consists of a restatement of the first line of the A' section, which is a repetition of “Praise to God and Mohammad” six times in Arabic. [To listen to this song, refer to the attached sound file, *KiaiKanjeng\_IlirIlir.mp3*.]

The music video to the song “Ilir-Ilir,” created by Cak Nun and members of Kiai Kanjeng, illustrates the musical melding between Arabic, Javanese and Indonesian, and further demonstrates the plurality in the nation’s character so often represented in Kiai Kanjeng’s music.<sup>355</sup> During the A section the Javanese landscape passes, and the viewer observes various male and female musicians in Islamic dress. A young girl wearing a headscarf carries a torch through the darkness, as if she is delivering Islam through the changing scenes of nature. Certain images, such as a bridge, convey the crossing of Islam geographically, as well as to people of all ages, who appear gladdened. The section closes with children jumping up in joy, laughing, perhaps with the gift of Islam. The aural intimation of Arabic Islam in the B section, suggested

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<sup>355</sup> See Notosudirdjo, “Kyai Kanjeng,” 2003 for further examples of this plurality.

by the musical style and Arabic mode, is coordinated with visual images revealing scenes of mosques and deserts. The young girl carrying the torch returns, this time followed by an image of a twentieth-century urban metropolis, possibly signifying that the Arabic ways of Islam have now been transferred into a contemporary Indonesian setting. In the return of the A section, the second time the melody is repeated the visual imagery shifts, shadowing the Muslim worshippers with the suggestion of jail bars, giving this final repetition a darker tone, and perhaps referencing perceived injustices towards Muslims during the Soeharto era. In the coda, with the repetition of the praise to God, the young Muslim girl steadfastly continues her journey, bearing the torch through the darkness, as the scene fades.

Musically and visually, the song represents a blending of the syncretism and mysticism of traditionalist Islam and modernist Islam that emulates reform by a purification of non-Arabic elements. Cak Nun capably interweaves these seemingly disparate positions, and is successful partly due to his own participation in both perspectives. In this piece, he embraces the mysticism of Indonesia's Sufi tradition by grappling with the poetry of Sunan Ampel and including disputed musical instruments, such as the gamelan and *bedug* (drum used in the call to prayer), both of which have been associated with pantheism, imbued with their own spirits. This is juxtaposed with the middle section, the Arabic prayer in an Arabic music style, and demonstrates a more modernist conception of Islam, visually highlighted through mosque imagery and Islamic dress.

Listening to the rhetoric of Cak Nun, however, it becomes clear that there is more to this piece than a musical joining of two disparate Islamic philosophies. Through his exegesis of Sunan Ampel's lyrics, he "locates Islam and its power to unite a community locally, in Jakarta

and in Java, and not in an imagined desert,”<sup>356</sup> and moreover positions an Islamic voice as a powerful critic for local politics.

In his article “Menyorong Rembulan dan Matahari Berkabut” (Pushing through the Moon and the Hazy Sun),<sup>357</sup> Cak Nun presents a line-by-line analysis of the song “Ilir-Ilir,” suggesting its relevance for guiding the future direction of Indonesian politics (see Appendix A). I translate the poem in its entirety below:

Lir ilir Tandure wus sumilir Tak ijo royo royo Tak sengguh temanten anyar	[Vocables signifying ocean waves] The plantation is in full growth and the foliage is all green. It is a gift befitting the newlyweds.
Cah angon, Cah angon Penekno blimbling kuwi Lunyu lunyu penkeno Kanggo mbasuh dodot-iro	Young shepherd child climb that starfruit tree even though it is slippery it will help cleanse our heart,
Dodot’iro dodot’iro Lumintir bedah ing pinggir Dondomono jlumatono Kanggo sebo mengko sore	Inside my heart One side is torn. Sew it... mend it... for the wedding celebration at noon.
Mumpung jembar kalangane Mumpung padang rembulane Yo surako. Surak: Hiyyoo	While the open field reveals our blessings, While the night is bright from the full moon, Let us give praise and rejoice. Give praise and rejoice.

The poem depicts five images: 1) a lush and fertile plantation, 2) a shepherd child climbing a slippery tree to gather starfruit, 3) torn clothes that must be mended, 4) a wedding celebration, and 5) a night bright from the light of the full moon. Cak Nun brings out each of these elements in relation to Indonesian politics, which he feels are in need of renewal and transformation by heeding the poetry of Sunan Ampel.

<sup>356</sup> Rasmussen, “Arab Musical Aesthetic,” 85.

<sup>357</sup> Emha, *Mata Ketawa Cara*, 91-105.

In his analysis, the fertile plantation represents the richness of the Indonesian land, a “heaven on earth” that, instead of sustaining the Indonesian people, has been exploited and mismanaged by its inhabitants. The young child who gathers the starfruit represents the leader of the people, indicated by the herding skill that is necessary for guiding his or her fellow citizens. The starfruit itself, having five points, is meaningful in that the number five has varying significances in Indonesian Islamic and political principles.<sup>358</sup> The tree is slippery, indicating that the path towards government reform will be difficult. The clothing represents the way the government and people represent themselves: the ripped attire demonstrates that there is no unity in that representation, and the demand to repair the clothes is as appeal for harmony and the return of lost dignity.

The crux of Cak Nun’s analysis lies in his interpretation of the final line, the meaning of the light of the full moon. In his view, the sun is a symbol of God, whose rays give power to the land and transform it into a fertile paradise. As a sign of God, it becomes evident why the wedding celebration, which might signify the union between man and woman, God and man, or between a leader and his people, occurs at noon, the height of the sun’s presence; it is in essence a poetic interpretation of tauhid, of oneness, discussed in the previous chapter. The moon instead symbolizes the Prophet Muhammad. Its role is to reflect the light of the sun back to the earth, because at night, the earth is hidden from the rays of the sun. Cak Nun reasons that while the Prophet first revealed the light, or message of God, that same task must be continually maintained by people each day, whether they be “saints, religious teachers, the leaders of humanity, government, social institutions, press, civic and national organizations,” so long as they translate God’s message “so that it becomes beneficial for the life of all humanity.”<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> For example, *pancasila*, five pillars of Islam, and five monotheistic religions.

<sup>359</sup> Emha, *Mata Ketawa Cara*, 103.

Instead of performing this task, he charges, these same leaders and institutions purposefully obstruct the light and redirect it for their own selfish gain. He ends his essay by challenging his audience to choose to be reflections of that light, so that Indonesia can reclaim its position as an autonomous and self-sufficient sovereign nation.

The political significance of “Ilir-Ilir” is hardly self-evident from the text of the poem; rather, Cak Nun carefully constructs its meaning through thoughtful analysis. However, he believes that he is not falsely imposing meaning on the text, but rather is restoring its original meaning, that has long been concealed in the shroud of profundity.<sup>360</sup> The words have prophetic meaning capable of providing deep insight and assisting in contemporary political crises. While the performative aspects of the piece, visually and musically, can provide a certain perspective on the syncretic union of traditional and modernist Islam, for the purposes of nationalist unity the song’s meaning is expanded exponentially when considered alongside Cak Nun’s rhetoric. This song demonstrates that the music and the performance of Kiai Kanjeng cannot be considered apart from Cak Nun’s spoken philosophies, which direct and guide the band’s interpretation.

“Ilir-Ilir” is an example of a prophetic song, written by a spiritual leader, and which contains essential wisdom that can help direct the future of the nation, should the citizens of Indonesia heed its message. “Gundul Pacul,” Cak Nun writes, is an example of an unhealthy song,<sup>361</sup> which warns against the harm that can befall Indonesia by ignoring these messages of the saints and thinking only of worldly gain for the sake of the individual. Cak Nun stages this song for Indonesian audiences, asking them to consider the question: “If we can’t even choose a healthy song to sing, how will we able to choose a president?”<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Cak Nun, discussion, 2007.

<sup>361</sup> Emha, *Kiai Bejo*, 180.

<sup>362</sup> Memilih lagu yang sehat saja kita tak becus, bagaimana memilih Presiden. Ibid.

“Gundul Pacul”<sup>363</sup> was composed after “Ilir-Ilir & Shalawat,” and appears on the album *Bangbang Wetan*. This album, named after another familiar piece in the gamelan repertoire,<sup>364</sup> was released on Cak Nun’s independent and locally managed record label Progress. As such, the visual elements of the accompanying music video represent a more loyal representation of the ensemble’s intentions. The song derived from a dramatic script of Cak Nun called *The Republic of Gundul Pacul* (1999), which in turn is founded on Cak Nun’s interpretation of the children’s song “Gundul Pacul.” The song is considered “traditional” but not attributed to a Javanese saint.<sup>365</sup>

The lyrics describe a carefree child<sup>366</sup> carrying a basket of rice on his head. As he walks, his head blithely bobs back and forth until finally the basket falls and the rice scatters on the ground.

Gundul-gundul pacul cul	Gundul Pacul,
Gembelengan, <sup>367</sup>	Head swaying
Nyunggi-nyunggi wakul kul	Carrying a basket on his head
Gembelengan,	Head swaying
Wakul ngglimpang	The basket falls
Segane dadi sak latar	The rice scatters on the ground

Musically, the original children’s song is in A-A-B-B form; the first two lines consist of the same material, and the final line “wakul ngglimpang segane dadi sak latar” adds a new melodic contour. The final line is repeated twice to create an even set of four phrases (figure 35).

<sup>363</sup> In his essay “Gundul Pacul, ‘Fooling Around,’ Cengengesan,” Cak Nun translates “Gundul Pacul” as a young boy, carefree and wild who does only as he pleases. Ibid, 178.

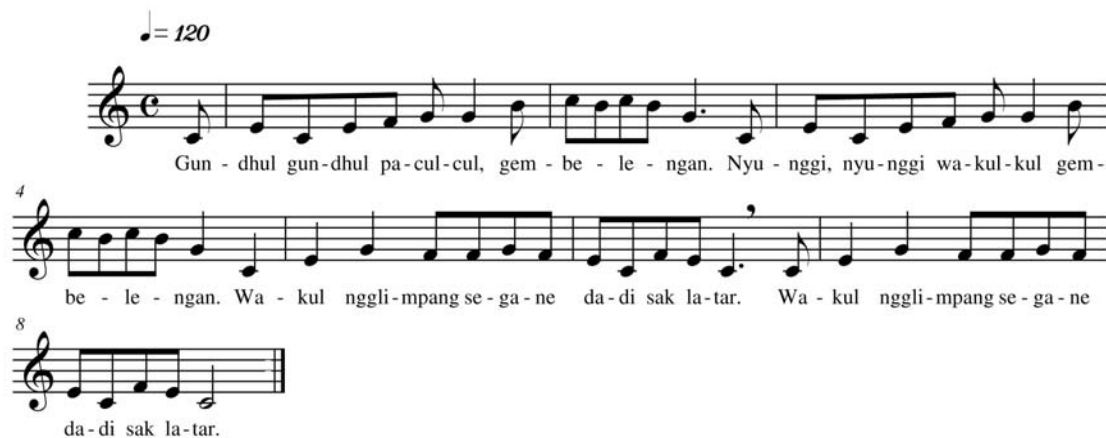
<sup>364</sup> “Bangbang Wetan,” better known as “Gendhing Sumirat” has achieved some attention for its unique modal qualities. Marc Perlman, “Conflicting Interpretations: Indigenous Analysis and Historical Change in Central Javanese,” *Asian Music* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 1996-Winter 1997), 124.

<sup>365</sup> View “Gundul Pacul” via Youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olKXsOJdsiQ> (accessed July 14, 2010).

<sup>366</sup> The child could be of either gender, but herein is referred to in the masculine.

<sup>367</sup> In his article, “Gundul Pacul, ‘Fooling Around,’ Cengengesan” (Emha, Kiai Bejo, 175-81), Cak Nun translates *gembelengan* as “fooling around,” upon which he bases his exegesis of the text. I translate it simply as the visual image of the child’s head swaying from side to side, because this is how it was taught to me.





**Figure 35. The original melody of "Gundul Pacul"<sup>368</sup>**

The version played by Kiai Kanjeng bears little resemblance to the original song. The piece has a catchy, upbeat feel, with an electronica-rock orientation, that also fuses elements of jazz improvisation midway through the piece. It is almost entirely instrumental, and seems to be purely for the audience's entertainment. A newly composed melody (figure 36) is separated into a musical dialogue between various instruments that seem lightheartedly to share the melody and musically answer each other's questions. The main voices include: 1) *sarons*, the metallaphones of the traditional gamelan, 2) electric guitar, 3) flute, and 4) electric violin. The original "Gundul Pacul" melody never emerges in the piece, though in the last thirty seconds, the gamelan musicians chant the lyrics on a low, monotone pitch, before the new melodic line reenters in the instruments. The piece ends in laughter and hollers of the musicians. [To listen to this song, refer to the attached sound file, *KiaiKanjeng\_GundulPacul.mp3*.]

Though the piece is highly enjoyable for Kiai Kanjeng's audiences as well as the musicians, it seems to have little in common with the original song, nor does it convey a sense of ideology or meaning to audiences. The video that the musicians created to accompany the music

<sup>368</sup> As taught to me by Agus Ampuh Wibowo, a friend and staffmember for Kiai Kanjeng's recording studio, Progress.

(ca. 2005) does not help the audience create meaning either, as it only provides shifting images of the band's tours abroad, and performance scenes of laughing musicians. The sole exception is that it adds one extra element to the audio version, when the video references the original version through an ironic singing of the piece by the lead saron player, Novi Budianto, in a traditional gamelan performance style, though this is not helpful for constructing more profound meaning. Greater understanding of the piece only emerges after listening to Cak Nun's philosophic interpretation of the underlying meaning of the "Gundul Pacul" lyrics, and only then is it clear why Kiai Kanjeng arranged the piece in the above-described manner.

As with "Iilir-Iilir," in his text, Cak Nun's mode of rhetorical analysis is to divide "Gundul Pacul" into its basic narrative components and then ruminate upon each element to discover its inherent meaning (see Appendix B). The main symbols of the song that he devises include: 1) the child, 2) the basket of rice, and 3) the action of the rice scattering.

The title of the song, "Gundul Pacul," Cak Nun says, is the name of the child. Basically a good child at heart, his behavior is that of a young rogue: mischievous, willful, and without discipline. "Essentially," Cak Nun jests, "he has both the talent and instinct of a serious anarchist" (*Intinya: punya bakat dan naluri anarkisme yang serius*).<sup>369</sup> Cak Nun relates the immaturity of this child as a symbol for the disarray of the Indonesian government. Like unruly children, the nation's leaders attempt to rule, but have little skill or life experiences to support their positions. They do not take their duties seriously, and instead allocate their resources to amassing their own wealth, without recompense to the community. Just as Gundul Pacul is a child, but acts as if he or she is already an adult, the politician is truly the employee of the people, but believes him or herself to be the boss.

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<sup>369</sup> Emha, *Kiai Bejo*, 178.

The second element of the song is the basket of rice. The rice represents the mandate of leadership, “the authority, the law, and the legitimacy of the government (*Bakul adalah otoritas, legalitas dan legitimasi pemerintahan*).”<sup>370</sup> The placement of the rice over the head indicates its sacred import, as Cak Nun says, “It is located on a level of dignity that is higher even than our own individual heads. It is positioned on a nobler plane, even when compared with self-interests, factions, or anything located within the realm of nation or country” (*Ditaruh di lapisan harkat yang lebih tinggi dari kepala individu kita sendiri. Diposisikan pada derajat yang lebih mulia dibanding kepentingan diri sendiri, golongan dan apapun saja dalam skala kehidupan berbangsa dan bernegara*).<sup>371</sup> The government should be treating their responsibilities as a sacred duty, but by corrupting the office, they place more importance on their own individual happiness than that of the country. When the rice scatters on the ground in the third element of the song, it indicates that the mandate has been abused and held in disregard. Cak Nun states that the rice “should be replanted, nurtured, and then redistributed with justice” (*Seharusnya padi ditumbuh-kembangkan, nasi didistribusikan dalam keadilan*),<sup>372</sup> but instead, it lies neglected. In the macrocosm of Indonesian politics, the politicians have ignored their sacred duty and their responsibilities to the people by focusing only on their own wellbeing and self-interests.

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

The musical arrangement of the piece evinces Cak Nun's philosophical interpretation. An introduction on synthesizer introduces a sense of the cosmic, alerting the listener to the creation of a world, unfamiliar to the audience. The main melody is then constructed piece by piece by gamelan metallophone, *saron*, in between which a rock guitar responds (figure 36).



**Figure 36. "Gundul Pacul," opening line on saron that is expanded throughout the piece**

The underlying rhythm section contrasts a variety of sounds that add an overall sense of confusion, though the tempo remains steady through each repetition of the melody. Occasionally the musicians shout (minute 1:30; figure 37, line 1), to further emphasize the rhythm, which also adds an extra layer of complexity and intensifies the general feeling of mayhem. On the second repeat of this simple melody, the sarons add syncopation of the rhythm in the gamelan (minute 1:40; figure 37, line 2).



**Figure 37. "Gundul Pacul" illustrating the syncopation that occurs on repetitions. On eighth notes, gamelan members shout "Hey, Hey!"**

This conveys the attitude of "gembelengan," or fooling around that Cak Nun discusses is the symptom of Gundul Pacul's behavior. After the first repetition of the melody in the gamelan, a

jazz flute howls its entrance and continues with a relaxed improvisation on the melody (minute 2:00), as if pondering how out-of-hand the situation has become, before the melody quickly returns through a lengthy duet between the electric guitar and bass, which battle their call-and-response styled dialogue, united only in their contribution to the entertaining sense of mayhem. This world of “fooling around” is framed by the return of the cosmic performed by the synthesizer. When the gamelan men’s chorus intones on a monotone the lyrics of “Gundul Pacul” at the end of the piece (minute 3:10; figure 38), it is almost as a warning for the musicians to stop fooling around. It is a ritual chanting urging the musicians to return to sobriety and realize the importance of their mission. Though the melody is intoned on one note, the rhythmic structure from the original children’s tune is kept intact.



**Figure 38. "Gundul Pacul," chanting the lyrics at the end of the song**

However, even beneath this sermon, the violin and electric guitar continue their spirited conversation. Ignoring these words as a child ignores his parents, the beginning melody (as in figure 36) returns (minute 3:30) giving the piece a sense of circularity, and the gamelan musicians join in as the ensemble degenerates into a cacophony of hoots and howls (minute 3:42).

Such a reading of the music is inspired by Cak Nun’s interpretative work on the song “Gundul Pacul” rather than inherently revealed in the musical notes themselves. The aural

musical experience is enhanced by Cak Nun's oration, as audiences consider their collaborative meaning. Though both Cak Nun's oration and Kiai Kanjeng's music are capable of standing alone as independent works, a more complete representation of their meaning is gathered from considering them as a unit, capable of informing one another.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

In my first conversation with Cak Nun, one of the questions I asked him was, "Do you consider yourself to be a Sufi?"<sup>373</sup> He stated that it was not his role to define himself, and that if I wished to truly know him, I should ask the question of the people closest to him. In fact, this type of answer to a rather forthright question is not unlike one of Rumi's more famous quotes about the nature of Sufism. "A Sufi," he said, "does not ask what a Sufi is."<sup>374</sup> Both answers speak to the importance of independence and experience that the mystical path stresses. The power to discern the characteristic of a person, or even of God, lies within the seeker, rather than in that which is being observed or sought. The object of inquiry merely *is*, existentially.

That Cak Nun emulates a Sufi path is evident in his writing, rhetoric, music, and methods of gaining knowledge. The literary scholar Harry Aveling summarized his own reasons for identifying him this way, after analyzing his poetry. He found that Cak Nun's works were characteristic of what he called "New Sufism" through his 1) belief that God's supremacy is the reason for human existence, 2) affirmation of the personal nature of God, 3) belief in the incomprehensibility of God, 4) direct references to the Qur'an, the prophets, and the Persian

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<sup>373</sup> "Apakah Cak Nun seorang Sufi?" Emha Ainun Nadjib [Cak Nun], in discussion with the author, July 2005.

<sup>374</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), vii.

mystics, and 5) neo-romantic imagery, located in a rural countryside. In his poetry, Cak Nun emphasizes total submission before a supreme God by exploring the mystery of God through interior religious experience.<sup>375</sup>

Aveling suggests that Cak Nun is so successful in Indonesia because as a “New Sufi” he could be “simultaneously modern ...and yet also available to the most conservative of believers.”<sup>376</sup> While Aveling maintains that this style of faith-seeking is a distinctive quality of Javanese Islamic mystic traditions,<sup>377</sup> Howell positions what she alternatively calls “Neo-Sufism” as part of a worldwide revival of Sufi thinking.<sup>378</sup> If indeed Cak Nun is a Sufi, is there a contradiction between describing him within both the Javanese and global landscapes? In her book on Sufism in the global landscape, Elizabeth Sirreyeh states that there is a “radical pioneering” occurring in contemporary conceptions of mysticism that has been developing since the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>379</sup> A general mainstreaming of Islamic ideas about Sufism has occurred, which is founded both in Sufi theosophy and modern European philosophy and that takes as its goal “to make mysticism relevant to the construction of new Muslim nations.” She notes that this “radical revivalist thought on Sufism” is both communal and introspective.<sup>380</sup> Through a belief in the fulfillment of the law as being collectively purifying, these Muslims become closer to God “as members of an Islamic society with a heightened sense of social responsibility. Mystical awareness leads them forward to active service in the community, not to isolation.”<sup>381</sup> Sirreyeh’s assessment of the global movement of Sufism bears much in common with Cak Nun’s messages, which are particularly resonant amongst the youth and often noted for

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<sup>375</sup> Aveling, *Secrets Need Words*, 336.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Geertz, *Religion of Java*, 336.

<sup>378</sup> Howell, “Sufism,” 710.

<sup>379</sup> Elizabeth Sirreyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), xi.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 167.

their nationalizing elements.<sup>382</sup> At the same time, Cak Nun, as a Javanese, is rooted within his own cultural tradition, both in his choice of musical songs, linguistic style, and beliefs. By accessing Javanese paradigms in his religious exegesis, his ideology becomes accessible to his audiences. Recognizing his identity as a Javanese as being a valuable form of expression, he encourages his non-Javanese followers to find modes of articulating their beliefs that coincide with their unique cultural characters.<sup>383</sup> In this way, he participates in a worldwide revival of Sufism, but chooses to locate his involvement within the ideological and musical landscape of Java.

Cak Nun's corpus speaks to a holistic approach to religious belief, and he weaves elements of spirituality into each aspect of his life's work, from his writing, to his social activism and art. His creativity derives from his systematic religious interpretation of the traditional as well as of current affairs. Rather than merely exercising his knowledge of Sufi principles to achieve a political aim, Cak Nun allows the exploration of Islamic particulars to occur according to the individual seeker. This disinclination to separate spirituality from daily practice is in itself a humanist expression of tauhid, the principle of unity.

Much can be gleaned from an analysis of Kiai Kanjeng's music, such as through its theatrical and musical elements,<sup>384</sup> instrumentation and musical style.<sup>385</sup> The songs themselves reveal narratives from religious relativism to nationalism, which can be evidenced using only musical and visual analysis. While these methods are both appropriate and necessary, they share only part of the story, for the success of the ensemble is equally derived from the strength of Cak

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<sup>382</sup> Notosudirdjo, "Kyai Kanjeng," 51.

<sup>383</sup> In concerts, Cak Nun asks for audience participation to sing local songs that are meaningful to them. Kiai Kanjeng will occasionally improvise alongside these volunteer singers.

<sup>384</sup> Rasmussen, "Arab Musical Aesthetic," 85.

<sup>385</sup> Notosudirdjo, "Kyai Kanjeng," 49.



Nun's preaching as a charismatic leader, or as Anderson might prefer, a "wild, rural kyai."<sup>386</sup>

From his position as a witness to Indonesian politics, he can speak of his observations and share them with his followers. By using traditional folk songs as a means of commenting on the contemporary, he empowers these texts as having inherent meaning. Considering these additional implications of his musical pieces obtained from a close reading of his rhetoric is a necessary and important component of analyzing his music.

At a performance at his home in Jombang, I asked Cak Nun if he could talk to me about the Javanese saint Syekh Siti Jenar. He considered my question for only a moment, before he quipped, "I *am* Siti Jenar."<sup>387</sup> To my quizzical expression, he repeated his answer, and then explained that if one really understood Jenar's philosophies, his words should be the correct response. As he was called onstage at that moment, we never finished the conversation, and so I offer it here by way of a conclusion. Nancy Florida writes that in "popular consciousness, Siti Jenar is remembered as the patron of the 'little man' (wong cilik)."<sup>388</sup> Through Cak Nun's constant dialogue with rural and urban Indonesians in his revivalist performances, his involvement with social activist groups, and his representation of the disenfranchised to local and national governments, Cak Nun defends the economically and socially disadvantaged without losing his influence with the political elite. In this way at least, he acts as a contemporary Siti Jenar, not only quoting Sufi philosophies, but by trying to live them. By placing his spiritual interpretations within his musical works, Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng are in essence performing their religious beliefs. Through Cak Nun's words and music, Sufism comes to life and can be heard in Java once again.

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<sup>386</sup> Anderson, *Language and Power*, 64.

<sup>387</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib [Cak Nun], conversation with the author, July 2007.

<sup>388</sup> Florida, *Writing the Past*, 353.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this dissertation, I posited that one of the important questions facing Indonesian politicians was not “*Could* Islam be an effective force in Indonesian politics,” but rather “*Whose* Islam would be ascendant in the nation’s politics?” Though my research by no means answers this ongoing query, this study helps to demonstrate the complexity and multiplicity of voices that have joined in the debate. Opinion about the role of Islam for contemporary Indonesia is not only found in the channels that a political scientist might expect (such as referendums, sermons at local mosques, and in the halls of congress), though these are certainly appropriate places to investigate. Viewpoints are also considered and discussed in the liner notes of music albums, the lyrics of hit songs, visuals on MTV, and the concert stage. Yet these spaces offer only a glimpse of what the Muslim composer, musician, or performer might hope to confer. A more complete understanding can be gleaned from their discourses on and off the stage, especially in their media interviews and prose writing.

Each of the previous three chapters discusses a Muslim artist and philosopher who strongly associates with a particular style of Islamic popular music. I have demonstrated that these three styles are Islamic only in regards to the lyrics and intention of the singers; otherwise they follow the same musical conventions as the popular and traditional music styles in which they are rooted. These snapshots of the musicians’ lives and music provide very different images

of their religious ideologies, especially in the way their political and spiritual beliefs affect their creative output.

Presenting them in this way, one example following the next with little opportunity for dialogue between these three characters, risks the danger that the reader will perceive their experiences as three isolated examples with slightly different aims, possibly prescribed by their musical style. In reality, Islamic popular music and musicians share more than the same shelf at a music store; there is often a lively interaction between performers and composers on and off the stage. Exchanges between musicians, even if it entails simply listening to one another's music, may suggest a musical and philosophical direction for a particular band, or provide a spiritual challenge that a musician might want to investigate. In these three case studies, each of the musicians and composers were very cognizant of one another. Workers at Daarut Tauhiid professed to me their admiration for Cak Nun as a spiritual teacher; one of Ahmad Dhani's first performances of his love song "Satu" (discussed in detail in chapter 3) was on the Jakarta stage of Kenduri Cinta, at a performance of Kiai Kanjeng; and Cak Nun has written separate articles on both Aa Gym and the band Dewa 19.<sup>389</sup> The musical experiences of these artists and philosophers are far from "isolated" but rich in musical and ideological association. As previously demonstrated, all are social activists, aiming to make their music meaningful to an Indonesian audience beyond mere religious inspiration. Such a goal would hardly be possible to attain in seclusion.

Though each composer writes in a unique musical (and rhetorical) language, this chapter attempts to bring their stories together for the purpose of comparison. In order to do this and further illustrate the inter-relationships between these musicians and their differing compositional styles, I would like to briefly return to the song "Tombo Ati" (Heart Medicine),

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<sup>389</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib, *Kiai Bejo, Kiai Untung, Kiai Hoki* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2007), 3-30.

which was introduced at the beginning of this dissertation. Originally a Javanese folk song, it has been performed by popular artists in many different styles including the three musical styles discussed in this dissertation: Islamic fusion, Islamic rock, and nasyid. Because of this, “Tombo Ati” seems an appropriate vantage from which to consider these three styles and begin a dialogue about their interrelationships.

The first popular-music version of the song to capture Indonesian attention was performed by Kiai Kanjeng in 1998. In fact, the release of their version of “Tombo Ati” coincided with their emerging popularity as nationally recognized musicians. The aim of Kiai Kanjeng in covering the Javanese folk song was “to revive traditional *wirid*” (Islamic songs, often chants) that they considered to be “assets” of Java’s “cultural wealth.”<sup>390</sup> As Cak Nun stated, choosing this piece “didn’t mean that it was the most important” of the Javanese Islamic songs, but only that they felt that it was “the most popular.”<sup>391</sup> The text of the song in Indonesian<sup>392</sup> and an English translation follow:

Obat hati	Medicine of the heart
Ada lima perkaranya	There are five ingredients
Yang pertama	First
baca Qur'an dan maknanya	Read the Qur'an and study its meaning
Yang kedua	Second
Sholat malam dirikanlah	Focus yourself in evening prayer
Yang ketiga	Third
berkumpullah dengan orang sholeh	Surround yourself with pious people
Yang keempat	Fourth
Perbanyaklah berpuasa	Fast often

<sup>390</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib [Cak Nun], in discussion with the author, August 2007.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> In Javanese, the lyrics are: “Tombo ati iku limo perkarane / Kaping pisan moco Qur'an dan maknane / Kaping pindo sholat wengi lakonono / Kaping telu wong kang sholeh kumpulono / Kaping papat kudu weteng ingkang luwe / Kaping limo dzikir wengi ingkang suwe/ Salah sawijine sopo biso ngelakoni / Mugi-mugi Gusti Allah njembatani.” I include the Indonesian in the text above, because that version (provided by many artists such as Opick and Inul Daritista) has a broader reach than the Javanese by virtue of being in the national tongue. One further observation is that because the original text is a folk song, the lyrics oftentimes vary according to the version. For example, in a performance by the group Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga, the order of the items is changed to: 1) read the Qur'an; 2) zikir; 3) fast; 4) gather with pious people; and 5) pray (instead of the above: read the Qur'an, evening prayer, gather with pious people, fast, zikir).

Yang kelima	Fifth
Dzikir malam perpanjanglah	Chant the zikir at evening's length
Salah satunya siapa bisa menjalani	Whoever can embark on each of these,
Moga-moga Gusti Allah mencukupi	May the Lord fulfill you.

In Kiai Kanjeng's version of the song, the melody is fairly close to the original folk-tune.

At the same time, their arrangement is uniquely their own, while remaining consistent with the style of Islamic fusion. The first half of the piece is heavily synthesized with a lengthy newly composed introduction on electronic guitar. This quickly transitions to a series of interlocking patterns on diatonic gamelan. While this second section is evocative of traditional Javanese genres, the diatonic tuning is non-traditional. Javanese gamelan music is generally performed in one of two scales: pelog (seven tones) and slendro (five tones). However, Kiai Kanjeng's instruments are tuned in a diatonic major scale, which allows for greater versatility in their repertoire. Using this tuning, they can easily switch from playing a Western or Arabic melody to a Javanese piece by emphasizing certain pitches. This particular shift, from a contemporary Western popular style via electric guitar to more traditional themes on gamelan, is signaled by Cak Nun's vocal transition. As he speaks above the instrumentation in an original dialogue with the audience, he moves first from an intoned chant to a more regular speech pattern. At one point, the gamelan musicians sing the unornamented melody of "Tombo Ati" beneath Cak Nun's spoken words (see figure 38).



**Figure 39. Opening vocal line of "Tombo Ati," as performed by the musicians of  
Kiai Kanjeng**

In the final section of the piece, Cak Nun begins singing the tune. This time, he ornaments the melody in a pop musical style as he approaches select notes by way of neighboring pitches, and uses a heavy vibrato on certain notes. The pivot point for this final shift from speech to song occurs when Cak Nun says the only English word in the piece, “Relax,” protracting the second syllable. Indeed, the song does feel very relaxed, not only because of Cak Nun’s lilting ornamentation, but also because of the slower tempo (quarter note = 63), the repetitive motion of the gamelan, and the addition of a lagging flute that accompanies the melody in heterophony. [To listen to their version, refer to the attached sound file, *KiaiKanjeng\_TomboAti.mp3*.]

“Tombo Ati,” from the album *Kado Mohammad* (1998), was Kiai Kanjeng’s first hit in Indonesian popular music. Since it is based on a folk song, the performers do not need copyright permission to “cover” the song—that is, arrange and produce their own version. After Kiai Kanjeng’s success with the song, other artists similarly arranged “Tombo Ati” in their own styles of performance. Numerous versions of the song have since been released and the text and music have been interpreted by popular music artists of various styles including rock, rap, nasyid, and dangdut. Some of these renderings have proved very successful, most notably Opick’s, whose cover of the song was considered at the beginning of this paper. Not only did Opick’s version eclipse Kiai Kanjeng’s in overall popularity, but his inclusion of the song on his album *Obat Hati* (the translation of “Tombo Ati” in Indonesian) helped it become one of the first religious pop albums to achieve platinum sales in Indonesia.

The decision of these artists to perform “Tombo Ati” is significant because it indicates that the song resonates with many Muslims in Indonesia, even if these Muslims share rather

different perspectives on their religion. As these different styles of Islamic popular music unite in a common repertoire, so too do the discourses and ideologies of the singers and musicians momentarily converge. Though the meanings change slightly with each adaptation, one commonality that crosscuts these versions is a renewed attention to indigenous Muslim philosophies. The original text, simply because it is Javanese, evokes an aura of antiquity. Though Indonesians are mainly bilingual, most business is conducted in the national language, Indonesian. As it becomes less essential to be proficient in ethnic languages, there is a growing fear that these languages are in decline, as in many multi-lingual societies. Because fewer people speak Javanese and it is rarely utilized in national genres like popular music, the text itself of “Tombo Ati” suggests historicity. Being labeled a “folk song” further augments this sense of authenticity. Most versions of this song draw attention to this historical aspect by performing the piece first in Javanese, and only thereafter in Indonesian translation.<sup>393</sup>

By clearly positioning the song as Javanese, artists demonstrate their increased commitment to indigenous understandings of Islam as being a legitimate source of Muslim philosophy. That these artists have gravitated towards a product of Javanese culture instead of one associated with another ethnicity, for example Sundanese, is noteworthy. Not only is Javanese the largest of Indonesia’s ethnic groups, it was once a dominant civilization in Indonesia, though weakened during the lengthy period of Dutch colonization. Since the nation’s independence in 1945, many Indonesians have feared a recurrence of what they call “Javanese hegemony.”<sup>394</sup> It is not clear to me whether performers of “Tombo Ati” are concerned with the

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<sup>393</sup> This style, possibly first performed in this way by Opick, is quite common. For example, Inul Daratista’s version, in the style of dangdut, presents the verse first in Javanese and then in Indonesian. However, she rewrites the lyrics. Despite the fact that the song was released under the name “Tombo Ati,” in the verse, she replaces the title lyrics with “Pesanan Hadith” (Messages of the Hadith). According to Inul, these messages of the hadith include guarding one’s health and earthly wealth.

<sup>394</sup> Sumarsam, *Gamelan: Cultural Interaction and Musical Development in Central Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 102-153. He writes (p. 125) about the effect of European intellectualism on Javanese gamelan

consequences of aligning themselves with Javanese versus other ethnicities' cultural items.

However, it *is* evident that Islamic popular musicians are consciously associating themselves with Indonesian Muslim cultural items, through the explicitly Muslim lyrics of “Tombo Ati.” By “turning inwards” and seeking indigenous approaches to spirituality, many of which have been historically inspired by Sufism, these artists participate in Indonesia’s most recent revivalism of Islam.<sup>395</sup>

Overt Sufi references in Indonesian popular music are not always common. Allusions to Sufism mainly appear in the artist’s non-musical discourse, as in the earlier example of Opick (chapter 1). For example, he stated that all his songs could be described as Sufi; in particular, he wrote in his biography that an Indonesian Sufi saint had originally composed the song “Tombo Ati.” However, in this song, Sufi references are directly present in the lyrics of the song itself. Not only are they explicitly Islamic, advising the listener to read the Qur’an, the lyrics are specifically Sufi when they ask the listener to chant the zikir at evening’s length. Zikir is the Sufi practice of chanting certain Islamic phrases repeatedly, often from the Qur’an. Because it is not prescribed in the Qur’an, scripturalist Muslims often discourage the chanting of zikir, viewing it as a foreign addition to Muslim practice. The popularity of “Tombo Ati” in many styles of Islamic popular music suggests that Sufi spiritual practices continue to be important for Indonesian Muslims, despite long-standing opposition by scripturalist movements. Sufi practices, while not prescribed by the Qur’an, have value because they provide Muslims with spiritual sustenance that is often seen as lacking in scripturalist Islam<sup>396</sup> (see chapter 4).

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practices, specifically regarding the elevation of court gamelan as an elite musical practice compared with other Indonesian musics.

<sup>395</sup> Howell, “Sufism,” 712.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.



As artists perform “Tombo Ati” in many different styles, musicians open up room for dialogue between one another and their creative output. As the same song is performed in rap, nasyid, folk, or rock, these styles are temporarily united in a shared repertoire, temporarily representing a single genre of Islamic popular music. Sometimes, though not always, the artist calls attention to cross-style relationships. For instance, in the rap version by Ebith Beat\*A, after the melody of “Tombo Ati” is sung twice through in Indonesian, the rapper implicitly links his theology to that of Aa Gym. Ebith Beat\*A extemporizes, “Hey, good evening; we’re doing some rap right now. We never understand how difficult life is getting, but our needs are never met. Oh, ternyata bukan hidup yang semakin sulit, tapi hati yang terlalu sempit” (Oh, actually it isn’t life that has become more difficult but that our hearts are too narrow, always making things complicated).<sup>397</sup> When Ebith Beat\*A says, “Oh, ternyata bukan hidup yang semakin sulit, tapi hati yang terlalu sempit” (Oh, actually it isn’t life that has become more difficult, but that the heart has become too narrow), it is almost an exact re-statement of one of the verses in “Jagalah Hati” (discussed in chapter 2). In “Jagalah Hati” Aa Gym had written the lines in the opposite order, but otherwise the meaning remains the same: “Tapi bila hati sempit, segalanya jadi rumit” (When the heart becomes narrow, everything becomes complicated). However, Ebith Beat\*A does not recommend the same solution as Aa Gym to the complications of life, “Jagalah Hati” (guard the heart); instead he shares five ways to heal the heart with a restatement of the song “Tombo Ati” (Heart Medicine). By directly referencing the text of “Jagalah Hati,” Ebith Beat\*A accomplishes two things: first, he successfully associates his rap style of music to that of nasyid; and second, his lyrics imply that Aa Gym’s more scripturalist approach to Islam can better be

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<sup>397</sup> This rap begins in English and ends in the Indonesian language. Ebith Beat\*A. “Ketika HATI bicara.” ASC-06-13, PT Arga Swara Kencana Musik. Compact disc. © and © 2006.

approached through indigenous Javanese understandings of Islam and spirituality. [To listen to Ebith Beat\*A's version, refer to the attached sound file, EbithBeatA\_ObatHati.mp3.]

The previous three chapters present individual examples of Muslim musicians and performers, each representing a particular compositional style in the genre Islamic popular music. In the rest of this chapter, I continue to bring their individual stories together, to draw conclusions about how meaning is created regarding religious and social responsibility in contemporary Indonesia via the medium of popular music. The personal narratives of these artists each presents a unique commitment to Sufi spirituality, similar in certain ways and differing in others. Moreover, each artist bears a distinct perspective regarding his own role as activist and healer in Indonesia's crisis-oriented political climate following the decline of the New Order.

## **5.1 ISLAMIC POPULAR MUSIC AS “UNIVERSAL”**

As popular Islamic leaders and as musicians, Aa Gym, Dhani, and Cak Nun each share narratives that express a leveling of social status between them and their followers. None completed a traditional Islamic education; indeed, it is surprising that any of them was initially recognized for their spirituality, moreover that they became religious leaders. Cak Nun dropped out of college after just one semester of studying economics in exchange for a life as a street poet. Dhani's secular rock career began in high school, and because of strict religious parenting, he seemed to reject overt religiosity in his music until the release of his fifth album. Aa Gym was considering a career in the army before he began his career as a small-time businessman. That none of them sought religious leadership indicates that they are “average” citizens, at first trying to succeed in

secular sphere. This is partly what makes them appealing to many Indonesians, especially those who do not have a strong religious background.

Their “shifts” toward a religious lifestyle share similarities that indicate a turning towards a Sufi-styled Islam, as opposed to a scripturalist one. Their move to the sacred seems incongruous with their personal histories and was one of gradual rather than revelatory change. Each of their narratives indicates the influence of Sufi Islam that inspired their spiritual transition. Cak Nun met a Sufi ascetic during his time on the streets of Malioboro, who to this day is the only man he names as his teacher.<sup>398</sup> Dhani too found a Sufi teacher, who spiritually challenged him to make his work meaningful and then single-handedly guided his transition. Finding a teacher that guides the student on the right path is the norm for students in Sufism, although for Dhani and Cak Nun, that path is loosely conceived rather than falling within the structure of a specific Sufi sect. One interesting parallel between Dhani and Cak Nun is that neither considers himself to be a Sufi. Dhani says he is a fan (*penggemar*) of Sufism and Cak Nun refuses any categorical definition. However, when they described their teachers to me, they both used the word Sufi (*Sufi*). Though they were speaking of their teachers, perhaps this is the closest either will get to describe their own identity as being Sufi as well.

Aa Gym’s vocation as a religious leader was instead inspired by a series of dreams that both he and his family members experienced, wherein the Prophet was searching for Aa Gym to lead his people. Dreams only have legitimizing power in mystical interpretations of Islam, where metaphysical considerations are held in equal or greater importance over legalist interests of Islamic orthodoxy. Dreams like these are common in early Indonesian accounts of Islamic conversion, such as the north Sumatran Sultan who dreamt of the prophet and when he awoke

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<sup>398</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib [Cak Nun], in discussion with the author, July 2005.

had a magically enhanced knowledge of the Qur'an.<sup>399</sup> That these dreams were then accepted by Aa Gym and his followers as being a legitimatizing factor of his religious leadership indicates that mystical Islam is still practiced in West Java and considered a legitimate source of gaining knowledge about Islam. Moreover, Sufi practices have instructive power: God specifically chose Aa Gym to be his servant, and Aa Gym's followers were ready to heed God's declaration.

The common theme to these three stories of spiritual awakening is that none of them aspired to become religious leaders, but rather they became spiritual teachers in spite of their unorthodox background. Their tales indicate an "everyman" quality shared by these three musicians. The Islamic popular musicians in this study, and even many of those not yet represented, ascribe this same sense of the ordinary to their music. One of the most commonly stated assumptions that Islamic popular musicians make is that their music is "universal" (the Indonesian term is borrowed from the English). The reason for ascribing this supposedly inherent quality to their music varies according to the musician, but in their discourses this same word appears.

Stating that one's music is universal in some cases allows the musician to avoid limiting his writing style to a specific genre or style. Just as Cak Nun consciously avoids defining a vocation for himself, labeling his music as universal allows him to circumvent this question of classification. Certainly, this avoidance of labels is one reason that the singer Opick chooses to label his music as universal. When I asked him if he considered his music to be nasyid, he commented in this way:

Saya nggak mau dikotak, di dalam satu kotak. Buat saya rock, atau pop, atau nasyid, atau apa. Saya musik saja. Musik saja. Apa saja. Saya bisa mainkan gitar dengan suling, atau gitar dengan gamelan, atau gamelan dengan distortion, bebas saja. Free saja. Apa perkusion dengan vokal apa, bunyi mulut saja, bisa. Jadi,

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<sup>399</sup> Anthony Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History," *Journal of Southeast Asia History* 2, no. 2 (1961): 10-23. He includes a more complete description of this and other stories of Sufi conversions.

jadi, tiba-tiba ketika saya berusaha untuk universal, untuk tak berfikir satu titik saja, saya merasa, ke mana saja saya bisa pergi, ke mana saja saya bisa melangkah.

[I don't want to be placed in a box and say that my music is rock, or pop, or even nasyid. It is just music, whatever kind. I can play guitar with a flute, guitar with gamelan, or gamelan with distortion. Just free... If I strive to make my music *universal*, to not think about the small points, I feel I can go anywhere; I can set off in any direction.]<sup>400</sup>

Though he has written material in a variety of musical styles, Opick's religious music is almost entirely soft rock. By positing that his music is universal however, he allows room for stylistic change in the future. Rather than defining his music within the parameters of a genre, he is more comfortable ascribing a mood to his music, believing that it is able to evoke a certain emotion or *rasa* (feeling) in his listeners. He says: "Ketika orang mendengar album saya, orang lebih merenung, meditatif. Maka saya sebut musik saya musik meditatif, merenung, contemplatif." (When people listen to my albums, they tend to meditate, contemplate. So, I call my music "meditative music," "contemplative music").<sup>401</sup>

Similarly, the repertoire of Kiai Kanjeng modifies according to their particular audience. For example, in their 2005 tour to Egypt, they performed pieces by Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum; while on the tour of the Netherlands in 2008, they added Dutch songs to their musical inventory. It seems plausible that they chose to label their music as "universal" because of the wide variety in their musical repertoire. Likewise Islamic rock songs, by commonly avoiding Islamic or Indonesian signifiers (as discussed in chapter 3), cast a wider net for listeners, and in this way might be understood as universal. For example, the rock musician Arman, of Gigi, told me that he believed that his listeners are first attracted by his band's musical style, and it may be months before they finally listen to what the lyrics are saying.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Opick [Aunur Rofiq Lil Firdaus], in discussion with the author, July 2007.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Armand Maulana (lead singer, Gigi), in discussion with the author, July 2007.

For nasyid artists, in whose music the message of Islamic values is dominant, this claim of “universalism” seem less understandable. At first, when a singer from New MQ voice categorized his music as “humanist” and “universal,”<sup>403</sup> I wondered how the references to the Qur’an that are implicit in his music could be conceived as having value and appeal beyond a purely Muslim constituency. As I continued the discussion with other artists, it became clear to me that, at least according to the performers, Islamic popular music genres are “universal” simply by virtue of being “Islamic.” As in the Qur’an, the religion of Islam itself is intended for all people, and should be made accessible to everyone. That Islamic popular music must philosophically remain true to Muslim principles is made clear by something Aa Gym told me.

Nasyid itu universal, karena Islam itu agama universal. Seharusnya menikmati nasyid tidak hanya orang Islam saja, seperti pelatihan di sini, kan? Yang ikut Kristen, Katolik, Hindu, Buddha. Semua ikut. Karena memang Islam universal. Islam bukan hanya untuk Islam. Kalau nasyid itu Islami, berarti untuk semua orang.

[Nasyid is universal because Islam is universal. The people who enjoy nasyid don’t just have to be Muslims, like the business training sessions here [held at the pesantren]. The ones who join are Christians, Catholics, Hindus and Buddhists. They all participate. Because Islam is indeed universal. Islam isn’t just a religion for itself. If nasyid is at all Islamic, then that means it is for everybody.]<sup>404</sup>

If there is such a category as Islamic popular music—which is contestable, as discussed in chapter 1—then there is an intended transference of value to the music itself, based in one’s religious understanding. Islamic popular music is imagined to be an authentic expression and manifestation of the artist’s inner spirituality. Aa Gym continued his evaluation of Islamic popular music, saying that successful music does not depend on the musical quality, but rather on the inner spiritual strength of the artist.

Walaupun suara bagus, kalau tidak pakai hati, mungkin tidak masuk. Deep inside, itu lebih penting. Yang penting, bagaimana para penasyid ini, tidak hanya bernyanyi, tetapi kata-kata baik, lirik-lirik baik, adalah sudah menjadi lifestyle-

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<sup>403</sup> Iman Dee (New MQ Voice), in discussion with the author, December 2006.

<sup>404</sup> Abdullah Gymnastiar [Aa Gym], in discussion with the author, May 2007.

nya, bagian para kehidupannya. Daripada hanya sesuatu yang enak didengar telinga.

[Even though the voice may be beautiful, if the artist doesn't use their heart, maybe their message won't get through.... It's what is deep inside the soul that is important. It is not only important how they sing, but that the words are good, the lyrics are good, and that this has already become a lifestyle for them, a way of living. It's more than just something that sounds nice to hear.]<sup>405</sup>

Beyond mere aesthetics, an Islamic song must represent an authentic expression of faith.

Because the composer is a representative of his/her faith and shares his/her understandings with their audiences, this theology must be both proficient and sincerely felt. While Aa Gym is writing specifically in the style of nasyid, the authenticity of an artist's religious expression is also open for scrutiny in the other styles of Islamic song writing. As discussed in chapter 3, secular rock musicians face regular criticism that they are "cashing in" on sales profits as they strategically release albums for religious holidays. Dhani's music undergoes constant criticism by fans, as his rock star lifestyle often includes activities like drinking alcohol, that are perceived to be antithetical to Muslim values. Similarly, Cak Nun reported that he felt pressure for his second wife, Novia Kolopaking, to wear the veil after their marriage, though when the former popular music singer eventually chose to wear the headscarf, it was of her own accord and *not* because of this perceived pressure.<sup>406</sup> Public perceptions of appropriate Muslim behavior not only have an impact on an artist's compositional technique, but also can influence even the non-musical aspects of their lives.

In his study of Islamic scholarship, the anthropologist Abdul Hamid el-Zein found that many of the works he examined understood "the meaning of religion as a *universal* form of human experience and of Islam as a particular instance [as] presupposed, invariable, and incontestable. All claim to uncover a *universal* essence, the real Islam" (emphasis added).

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib [Cak Nun], in discussion with the author, August 2007.

Despite this “universal” significance, el-Zein challenged these scholar’s assumptions that such a “real Islam” existed, stating that, “ironically, the diversity of experience and understanding revealed in these studies challenges the often subtle premise of the unity of religious meaning. It then becomes possible to ask if a single true Islam exists at all.”<sup>407</sup> As Islamic popular musicians of differing musical styles claim that their particular type of music is universal, el-Zein’s assessment seems relevant for considering their remarks.

Though both scholars and practitioners claim that the religion of Islam is something universal, el-Zein determined that there are instead many contrasting examples of “local islams” (*sic*). As discussed above, each of the three musicians experienced a turning towards Islam as a vocation that was characterized by elements of spirituality. However, in their treatment of these spiritual aspects, a series of distinct differences emerges that indicates a range of ideas about Islamic spirituality, rather than just one “universal” understanding. These differences are located not only in their musical compositions, but in the treatment of religious theology in their discourse. Given the number of Islamic philosophers and practices, finding a multiplicity of viewpoints is not surprising. It is only by examining their viewpoints as representative of the styles in which they are composing that ideas about Sufism can begin to be understood within popular Indonesian culture, and, more specifically, for Indonesian popular music.

## 5.2 CRAFTING THEOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATIONS

When I was already deep in the process of ethnography, C. Holland Taylor, the director of the non-profit organization LibForAll, advised me with these words: “If you want to know what

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<sup>407</sup> Abdul Hamid el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977): 227.



Emha [Cak Nun] really believes, ask him who he reads. What's in his library? Which Muslim philosophers does he associate with?" It seemed like good advice, and I not only asked this question of Cak Nun but also addressed it to Ahmad Dhani, Aa Gym and countless other musicians and performers. In retrospect, the question was only answered in the way that I'd originally hoped by Ahmad Dhani, but maybe that is because Dhani is a rock star and used to answering questions about his influences with a laundry list of bands that inspire him. Both Cak Nun and Aa Gym were not only reluctant to answer directly, but Cak Nun even confounded my expectations by replying that he didn't read anybody! And while I did spend a fair amount of time in his library, I discovered that many of the books there were actually gifts from his many visitors. Though the search took a bit more effort than Taylor might have imagined, I eventually came up with my own list of theosophists that seemed meaningful to these artists, based on who they most frequently quoted in their speeches and writings.

Taylor's questions are important ones because the associations that a composer or performer makes with recognized religious teachers are conscious and strategic. Knowing an artist's theological influences provides insight into their understanding of religion, and in the case of my research, helped alert me to their similar regard for Sufi principles. Equally important, their ideological relationships indicate how each artist views his role in Indonesian society as a social activist, and this will be discussed in more detail below. Third, the associations of their works with particular philosophers (Indonesian or Arabic) indicates whether they tend to look inwards, at a local and cultural level of understanding of their religion, or outwards on a global level of understanding about Islam.

As Aa Gym's pesantren Daarut Tauhiid grew in size and influence, he wrote a book that outlined the philosophies underlying his *Manegemen Qolbu* (Heart Management) conglomerate.

He titled the book *Jagalah Hati* after his song of the same name, and throughout the book the text of the song plays an important role in drawing attention to certain aspects of his ideology.<sup>408</sup> This book is central in understanding Aa Gym and the philosophies of his pesantren. In it, Aa Gym makes reference to several Muslim philosophers, especially Jalaluddin Rumi and al-Ghazali. However, it is to the latter that Aa Gym gives special consideration.

That Aa Gym chose al-Ghazali to associate with his teachings is significant because in choosing an Arab scholar, it becomes clear that he is looking to the Middle East rather than to his own society for religious inspiration. He could just as easily have quoted a Sundanese Muslim philosopher, or an Indonesian of any ethnic group. In this, Aa Gym shares something with practitioners of Reform Islam in Indonesia and other parts of the world. Muslim Reformists often reference Arabic texts and philosophers over indigenous ones, in an attempt to restore Islam to its original form. Many of these Reformists believe that philosophers who are Arabic are closer to the source of Islamic history and thereby impart a “purer” form of Islam, despite their own historical and cultural distance from Islam’s earliest periods. Primarily Muslim Reformers seek to expunge heretical, syncretic elements from Islam, and their movement was widespread in Indonesia at the turn of the twentieth century. As the leader of Muhammadiyah, Abdul Munir Mulkan, has noted, many of these Muslim Reformists have since begun to re-examine syncretic practices once thought heretical, such as Indonesian Sufism, and believe in their ability to proffer Muslims with a sense of spirituality that many found to be missing in their religious practice.<sup>409</sup> However, Sufism was not always considered to be something merely “spiritual.” In his recent work tracing patterns of Islamic intellectualism between Indonesia and

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<sup>408</sup> Abdullah Gymnastiar, *Jagalah Hati: Step by Step Manajemen Qolbu* (Bandung: Khas MQ, 2005),

<sup>409</sup> Howell, “Sufism,” 713.

the Middle East, the historian Azyumardi Azra demonstrates that historically, Sufism in Indonesia was “puritanical” and based entirely in Islamic law.<sup>410</sup>

Aa Gym’s choice to represent Sufi ideology with an Arab (rather than Indonesian) philosopher at first glance seems to support these ideas of Reformist Islam, that Indonesian Sufi theologians are responsible for Islamic hybridization and therefore worthy of suspicion. However, when in the second chapter I demonstrate specific ways that the text of Aa Gym’s song “Jagalah Hati” shares similarities with al-Ghazali’s philosophies, a different story about Aa Gym’s relationship with Sufism emerges. Al-Ghazali is best known for his ability to synthesize the experiences of the mystic’s lifestyle with the seemingly confining Islamic law. A visit to Aa Gym’s pesantren is enough to remind the guest of Aa Gym’s law-oriented teachings: stores are closed at the prescribed times for prayer, men and women are rarely seen on the same stage during performances, let alone sitting together in the audience, and an overall sense of orderly structure is apparent, from the neatly organized shoes outside a building to the smiling face of Aa Gym on almost every wall, accompanied by one of his catchy slogans. At the same time however, Aa Gym incorporates Sufi practices throughout his sermons, encouraging both ritual weeping between him and his audiences, as well as through the performance of zikir. Like al-Ghazali, Aa Gym legitimizes Sufi practice, as long as it occurs within the structure of the law. The legitimization of Sufism is something that is practiced, but not condoned rhetorically. For example, when I asked him if Sufism (using both the words *Sufi* and *tarekat*) was an important part of his practice at the pesantren Daarut Tauhiid, Aa Gym said he was not really qualified to answer such a question because he did not know much about these ideologies. Instead, he said, “It is better for me to tell the beautiful life of Islam, because for some people, Sufism is... yes, its

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<sup>410</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 139.

Muslim...but it's only one side of Islam. I believe the whole of Islam is beautiful." I then asked him to elaborate on his studies of Sufism at a West Javanese pesantren, to which he answered that in his own teaching, he only utilizes "some of what [he] learned, but using language that is easier to grasp (*bahasa ringan*)."<sup>411</sup> For Aa Gym, Sufism is a tool to encourage spirituality, but is only effective when combined with Islamic law. Because of this, he doesn't draw attention to his use of Sufi practices, and when asked about them he tends to obfuscate their importance in his teachings.

Alternatively, Ahmad Dhani clearly aligns himself with Sufism, through his conscious affiliation with two Sufi martyrs: the Persian mystic al-Hallaj and the Indonesian Sufi, Syekh Siti Jenar. These theologians play similar roles in the annals of Sufi literature; they both believed that a divine union was possible between man and creator, and both were martyred for what was seen as heretical beliefs. The mystical events surrounding their deaths are akin as well, described in detail in chapter 3. Though much is made of Dhani's admiration for al-Hallaj in his interviews with the media, Dhani shares a closer kinship with Syekh Siti Jenar, even going so far as to thank him in the liner notes of one of his music albums (*Laskar Cinta*). Though Dhani is certainly an enthusiast of Middle Eastern and Arabic mystics (even naming his children after several notables), when it comes to his music, he affiliates his work with an Indonesian theologian. I understand this act to be a strategic one that originates in Dhani's strong identification with Indonesian nationalism. At the end of chapter 3, I discussed Dhani's established affinity towards Indonesia's first president Sukarno. Just as Sukarno legitimated his power partly by appealing to Javanese Islamic sensibilities, so too does Dhani justify his own musical inspiration through reference to a Javanese Muslim saint. Though Dhani says he is a "fan" (*penggemar*) of al-Hallaj, his acclaimed Sufi song about unity, "Satu," is dedicated to

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<sup>411</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.

Jenar. This suggests that he identifies his musical works with Indonesian mystics and that he is willing to place Indonesian Sufis on the same authoritative plane as their Middle Eastern counterparts.

Finally, Cak Nun professes not to read much religious philosophy, nor to be overly influenced by theologians.<sup>412</sup> Instead, he says that he receives most of his inspiration for sermonizing and song-writing through personal meditation and interpretation. Traditional texts, such as folk songs, that are common to many Indonesians (particularly Javanese) comprise the majority of his philosophical material, and he interprets these texts to determine their “inner” (original) meaning. While many of these works were supposedly written by Indonesian saints, as in the case of “Irir-Irir,” others are simply folk songs, significant mainly because of their deep-rooted connection with Javanese culture, as is true of “Gundul Pacul.” Cak Nun’s interpretive ability is intuitive, relying on philological exegesis enlightened by his own spirituality to create theological meaning. Moreover, by taking for granted that commonplace ethnic texts are worthy of profound meditation, he presupposes their legitimacy as meaningful religious authorities, without first having to justify these works with regards to Arabic-originated theological works.

### **5.3 THE ARTIST AS TEACHER AND CIVIC LEADER**

By virtue of an artist performing Islamic popular music, the musician guides his audiences in matters of faith, effectively becoming a “preacher” of Islam. While Cak Nun and Aa Gym are already recognized religious leaders beyond their musical practice, the musicians they work with, as well as other Islamic popular musicians, take on leadership responsibilities by publicly

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<sup>412</sup> Cak Nun, discussion, 2007.

performing their faith. One of the common themes that became evident to me through my discussions with Muslim artists was the idea that for them, performing Islamic music meant sharing their faith with the audience. Munsyid conceive of their lyrics as one way to preach (*ber-dakwah*). Dhani struggled to make his music “meaningful” to an Indonesian audience; he strove on his album *Laskar Cinta* to teach what he considered to be the highest level of Islam (*hakikat*), that of love. And the musician S.P. Joko of Kiai Kanjeng told me that he believed one of the enemble’s main tasks was to teach Indonesian Muslims about their indigenous Islamic heritage. When I asked him about the Javanese mystic Syekh Siti Jenar, he proclaimed that just by my question, it was clear to him that Kiai Kanjeng was achieving that goal.<sup>413</sup> Islamic popular music is thus meaningful *because* it is didactic, and as musicians assume the role of leaders and teachers, they share that meaning with their listeners.

Teaching of any kind implies change; as students learn new ways of thinking, their perspectives transform and adapt. The Islamic scholar John Esposito has devised a four-part model to classify how contemporary Islamic leaders visualize change. His model helps explain how these musicians take on the role of Islamic leaders, particularly how they create musical and theological meaning for their audiences. Esposito suggests that there are “four discernable orientations toward change” of contemporary Islamic reformists (those interested in the revitalization of Islam and placing religion in the perspective in national politics), which he labels 1) traditionalist, 2) secular, 3) neorevivalist, and 4) neomodernist. The latter three roughly correspond with the musical styles presented in this dissertation.<sup>414</sup>

Esposito characterizes the “secular” leader as someone who: advocates for the separation of religion and politics; relegates religion to personal life; and often belongs of a westernized

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<sup>413</sup> S.P. Joko (musician, Kiai Kanjeng), conversation with the author, July 2007.

<sup>414</sup> John L. Esposito, editor, *The Oxford History of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 681-4.

elite sector of society.<sup>415</sup> Such a depiction is suggestive of Dhani and many of the musicians writing Islamic rock music. Though Dhani's language—especially in the song “Laskar Cinta”—is Muslim, his lyrics and videos suggest that Islam is not superior to other religions. Dhani's music must be at least somewhat reflective of other ideologies because the lead singer of his ensemble Dewa 19 is Christian, not Muslim. Partially, this explains why Dhani takes common elements of Indonesia's monotheistic religions and writes songs based on those themes. For example, Dewa 19's song “Satu” (One) demonstrates a leveling of religious belief; the video represents each of the five band members as a member of a different religion as if to say that all religions are one, and seeking the same union with God. That the most repetitive image, also included in the first and final scenes, is that of Dhani as a Mevlevi whirling dervish, the only indication besides the liner notes that the mystic lyrics are inspired by Islam.

Dhani and of his teacher Faiz both define Sufism through reference to non-Muslim ideas, indicating a process of secularization in their conceptions of spirituality. For example, in our discussion of Sufism, Dhani's teacher Faiz began to sing the chorus of John Lennon's “Imagine” (1971) from the album of the same title. After singing through the chorus, Faiz declared: “That is Sufi!” Though Lennon was writing of global unity, his song has been used an anthem for many different causes throughout the world, by people of many different faiths.<sup>416</sup> Using secular examples to explain Sufi concepts, Faiz applies a broad definition of Sufism that could equally be labeled as Hindu, Christian, or even simply “humanist.”

The term neorevivalist, according to Esposito, represents those Muslims popularly referred to as “fundamentalists” who emphasize a return to Islam. Usually lay leaders, they reinterpret and reapply Islam's original sources to contemporary society and are especially

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> “Imagine: John Lennon,” *Rolling Stone*, online edition, December 9, 2004, accessed February 20, 2009.

critical of westernization as weakening Islam's renaissance. Through the appropriation of Western-style doo-wop music, the rhythm-and-blues inspired genre of nasyid is transformed to reflect neorevivalist ideologies. As I described in chapter 2, munsyid initially believed that instruments were unacceptable (*haram*), and they focused on their musical lyrics as being in the tradition of Muslim poetry. Nasyid singers dress conservatively, in an Indonesian Islamic fashion, and bands are single-gendered, but most often male. Aa Gym recommends that women should only perform before other women to protect them in the way prescribed by the Qur'an. "More than just something that sounds nice to hear" (*enak didengar*)<sup>417</sup> the sounds and images associated with Western popular music were modified to acceptably correspond with Islam's latest renaissance.

The work of Kiai Kanjeng and the style of Islamic fusion roughly correspond with Esposito's category of neomodernism. Esposito characterizes neomodernists as being selective in their approach to Western philosophy. Wanting to learn from the West without westernizing Muslim society, they seek to bridge the gap between the traditionally and secularly educated. It is this last quality that I find resonates with the philosophies and musical works of Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng. Cak Nun's analysis of Javanese folk tunes makes traditional lyrics meaningful for contemporary secular and Muslim audiences. The meanings, when translated properly, contain relevance for constructing a Western-styled democracy that is based upon traditional spiritual values. As I discussed in the chapter 4, Cak Nun interprets the folk song "Iilir-Iilir" in such a way that the text provides guidelines for contemporary Indonesian political leaders. According to his interpretation, a leader should be the type of person who leads, not for glory, but in order to tend to the needs of each civilian. Cak Nun determines that the metaphors in the song (the moon reflecting the light of the sun to the earth) represent the way a leader should redirect God's love

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<sup>417</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.



to the people. The leader must be spiritual, but not simply a representation of God on earth, as might be found in historical Javanese cosmology. Likewise, Cak Nun ascertains that the song “Gundul Pacul” also teaches lessons about leadership; a leader should be responsible and loving, and should regard leadership duties as a sacred mandate, to be guarded above all else. By examining folk songs as possessing insight into qualities of political leadership, Cak Nun and his ensemble Kiai Kanjeng return power to traditional modes of expression. But instead of merely touting traditional philosophies, he reinterprets these lessons for his listeners, and provides them with renewed meaning for contemporary democracy.

Esposito’s classification scheme seems appropriate, though there is a danger of over-prescribing these terms and definitions, despite the necessity of such models to highlight difference. “Orientations of change”<sup>418</sup> occur within a specific time, as responses to what has come before and what artists visualize for the future. The musical style of nasyid particularly demonstrates a simplicity in these terms; even in the ten years that nasyid music has been “booming”<sup>419</sup> in Indonesia, the ways that musicians adapt their product to new situations is constantly adjusting. Chapter 2 illustrated how artists arrange and modify hit songs (with emphasis on Aa Gym’s song “Jagalah Hati”) in order to show that the musical style of nasyid artists is not stagnant. Aa Gym’s originally a cappella piece was first inundated with percussion, synthesizers, and finally a full orchestration with Latin dance beat. By modifying their musical language, nasyid artists participate in an Islamic renaissance in Indonesia that is lively, innovative, and musically responsive.

While Esposito’s model helps position Islamic actors within a broader spectrum of religious orientation and spiritual change, I use it here not to present it as an infallible model, but

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<sup>418</sup> Esposito, *Oxford History of Islam*, 681.

<sup>419</sup> Aa Gym, discussion.

to highlight the difference and commonality between each of the chapters. None of the categories that Esposito identifies are mutually exclusive, because to a certain extent Dhani, Aa Gym and Cak Nun are each neomodernists. Each seeks innovative roles for Islam in society and inspires audiences to think about religion in certain ways. Whatever these musicians' place in the range of "local islams" in Indonesia, Esposito's model provides one means through which to consider the ways that individuals and their works contribute to ideas about Islam that might be occurring in many different spheres of Indonesia, beyond the popular music scene.

#### **5.4 ISLAMIC POPULAR MUSIC AND CIVIC FUNCTION**

Islamic popular musicians participate in a larger revival of Sufi principles that has been ongoing in Indonesia at least since the late 1990s. However, rarely do these musicians claim that their music is specifically Sufi. Whereas in India, a growing identification with Sufism has culminated in the creation of a genre of Sufi popular music,<sup>420</sup> there is no similar self-named genre in Indonesia. Islamic popular music may share much in common with Sufi ideologies but artists do not consciously call their music "Sufi." Each of the artists represented in this study, despite their admirations for certain tenets of Sufi Islam, decline to characterize themselves in this way. This does not mean that these artists necessarily refuse the label of Sufi. As Cak Nun explained, it is up to others to define who a particular person is, not the individual him or herself.<sup>421</sup> Or as the Persian mystic Rumi explained, "A Sufi does not ask what a Sufi is."<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Peter Manuel, "North Indian Sufi Popular Music in the Age of Hindu and Muslim Fundamentalism," *Ethnomusicology* 52, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 378-400.

<sup>421</sup> Cak Nun, discussion, 2005.

<sup>422</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), vii.

Whether or not Islamic popular artists identify themselves as Sufis or even neomodernists, each of the three previous chapters demonstrates how musicians actively promote ideologies of change. These transformations are internal in nature rather than external, and artists through their music and discourse encourage their audiences to incline the heart toward meditation in order for them to discover certain truths about Islam. Indeed, the Indonesian scholar Azyumardi Azra finds that Sufi ideologies in Indonesia have historically “appealed to Muslim activism; for them [Sufists], the fulfillment of Muslims’ worldly duties was an integral part of their spiritual progress in the mystic journey.”<sup>423</sup> In his discussion of neomodernists, Esposito makes a similar claim that they too are “activists,” flexible and creative in thought. By being activists, each of these musicians balances their local and global understandings of Islam crafted through their theosophic associations, with a third strata of identification, that of the nation (Indonesian).

Islamic popular artists intend their music to be meaningful and have a civic function for Indonesia. Sometimes musicians are challenged to find a purpose for their music, as in the case of Dewa 19, when Dhani was challenged by his teacher to create “something useful” in his album *Laskar Cinta*. Other times, the performance site itself is offered as a civic arena. For example, as they invite politicians and other guests to join them on the concert stage to share their perspectives, Cak Nun and the members of Kiai Kanjeng create miniature sites for democracy. People participate in these events partly because of their attraction to Cak Nun’s charismatic persona, but also to listen to the musical (and sometimes theatrical) performances of Kiai Kanjeng.

The ways that artists create meaning in their music suggests an uncoordinated effort to perform civic duty through religion, by promoting healing and peace through the Islamic arts.

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<sup>423</sup> Azra, *Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 139.

Both Aa Gym and Cak Nun positioned themselves at sites of political crisis in order to promote healing through their preaching and music. As I discussed in chapter 2, Aa Gym traveled in 2002 to war-torn Poso where he addressed both Christians and Muslims. One of the tools that he used to encourage religious unity was his musical performance of his composition “Jagalah Hati.” Aa Gym staged almost identical services at other crisis areas throughout Indonesia. For instance, Aa Gym was one of the first Muslim leaders to speak at the site of the Bali bombings in 2002, when terrorist members of Jemaah Islamiyah killed 202 civilians including 164 foreign nationals (mostly Australian.) Cak Nun and the members of Kiai Kanjeng similarly performed in many areas throughout the archipelago, traveling deep into regions devastated by ethnic and religious warfare, such as Kalimantan in 1999 and Ambon in 2000. As the keyboard player Bobiet remembered, they didn’t charge for these performances; they just wanted to help in any way they could. Bobiet found that their music proved to be very calming, and audiences immediately responded to it.<sup>424</sup> By positioning their performances at locations of natural disaster and/or civilian warfare, Islamic popular musicians seek audiences receptive to their spiritual messages of healing, and in so doing obtain exposure for their music.

Beyond performing at conflict sites, Islamic popular musicians generate dialogue with statewide ideologies about religion, either for purposes of endorsement or opposition. For instance, Dhani’s video for his hit song “Satu” (discussed in chapter 3) upheld the national doctrine of monotheism by depicting each musician of the ensemble Dewa 19 as a member of a different monotheistic religion. However, they simultaneously offered a subtle dissent when they depicted one of their band members as a Jew, because the Indonesian government does not officially recognize Judaism. Another song by Dhani, “Indonesia Saja,” promotes the state motto, “unity in diversity.” The lyrics advance a sense of nationalism, stating that Indonesians

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<sup>424</sup> Bobiet Santoso (musician, Kiai Kanjeng), conversation with the author, August 2007.

should not “feel” (*merasa*) different based on their ethnicity or religion; instead they should be united because of their Indonesian identity (*aku hanya merasa, aku orang Indonesian saja.*)

## **5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This dissertation explains several ways that popular musicians negotiate ideas about Islam in their artistic works. Popular musicians emphasize certain theologies that can be conceived as specifically Sufi, which they make known principally through their non-musical discourse (e.g. preaching, album notes, interviews). What Sufism means for a musical work differs according to each artist. In some cases, ideas of Sufism are directly embedded in the concept of an album (as in the work of Dhani and Dewa 19); in others it is sophisticatedly manipulated through the discourses surrounding the music (as in the work of Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng); and in still others, it is subtly suggested and obfuscated (as in the example of Aa Gym and nasyid). Emphasizing Sufi principles indicates a kind of deep listening, as artists speak to the inner spirituality of their listeners. References to Sufism in popular music, particularly allusions to Sufi theosophists, allow Indonesian artists to associate their own lives and theologies to larger Islamic lineages, both within historic Java and in the Middle East.

This research project exists within a body of literature concerning Islamic popular music and Indonesian Islamic theology that has been slowly growing in the past decade. My dissertation is concerned primarily with musical and Muslim leaders whose compositions are specifically Islamic through identifying markers in the text, performance practice, or merely by their identification as such by the composers.

Throughout this work, I have posed additional questions that were beyond the scope of this study and which present potential areas for future scholarship. In its present form, this study looks at leaders; it does not address how their images of Islam are reflected in potential audiences, or those interested in the revitalization of Islam. An audience-focused study in Islamic popular music would be a welcome contribution for future scholarship. A second avenue of useful research would be historical in nature. This paper deals with contemporary trends in Islamic popular music, determining the ways that musicians are active participants in Indonesian's recent Islamic revival, that of Sufi spirituality. By associating their musical works with Islam's mystical traditions, historically significant in Indonesia, artists contribute to the continuing and powerful influence of Sufi Islamic traditions. While this study is of contemporary musicians in post-Suharto Indonesia, a historical survey of Islamic popular music in Indonesia might indicate that this Sufi revival, at least regarding popular art traditions, has more extensive roots in Indonesia.

## APPENDIX A

### CAK NUN'S "MENYORONG REMBULAN DAN MATAHARI BERKABUT"

#### A.1 AUTHOR'S NOTE

Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun) is one of Indonesia's most prolific authors, yet very few of his writings have been made available to an English readership. He has written about many of the pieces of music that are important to his repertoire. This appendix provides his original text and my translation to his essay "Menyorong Rembulan dan Matahari Berkabut,"<sup>425</sup> so that the reader will be able to 1) better understand my interpretation of his musical arrangement of the Javanese folk song "Ilir-Ilir" presented in chapter 4, and 2) draw his or her own conclusions about the relationship between song and prose in the work of this artist. The original article is written in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia, though the song text is in Bahasa Jawa (Javanese), the largest ethnic language in Indonesia. I have tried to retain all grammatical nuances of the original essay, including capitalization, punctuation and italicization. Errors in translation are entirely my own and for these I necessarily apologize.

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<sup>425</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib, *Mata Ketawa Cara: Refot-nasi* (Yogyakarta: Zaituna Yogyakarta, 1998), 91-105.

## A.2 THE ORIGINAL WRITING IN BAHASA INDONESIA

“Menyorong Rembulan dan Matahari Berkabut”

Lir ilir tandure wus sumilir  
Tak ijo royo-royo  
Tak sengguh temanten anyar  
Bocah angon bocah angon penekno blimbing kuwi  
Lunyu-lunyu penekno kanggo mbasuh dodot-iro  
Dodot-iro dodot-iro lumintir bedah ing pinggir  
Dondomono jlumatono kanggo sebo mengko sore  
Mumpung jembar kalangane  
Mumpung padhang rembulane  
Yo surako  
Surak: Hiyyoo

Bisakah luka yang teramat dalam ini akan sembuh? Mungkinkah kekecewaan, bahkan keputusan yang mengiris-iris hati berpuluh-puluh juta saudara-saudara kita akan pada suatu hari kikis?

Kapankah kita akan bisa merangkak naik ke bumi, dari jurang yang sedemikian curam dan dalam? Benar tahukah kita apa yang sesungguhnya kita alami? Sungguh pahamkah kita apa yang sesungguhnya kita sedang kerjakan? Mengertikah kita ke cakrawala mana sebenarnya kaki kita sedang melangkah? Benarkah yang salah selalu adalah ia dan mereka? Sementara yang benar pasti kita dan saya? Benarkah yang harus direformasi selalu adalah yang di situ dan di sana, dan bukan yang di dalam diri kita sendiri? Mungkin reformasi eksternal tanpa berakar pada reformasi internal? Apakah sesungguhnya yang sedang berlangsung di dalam syaraf-syaraf hati kita serta sel-sel otak kita?



Sistem nilai apakah yang sesungguhnya kita pilih untuk mengerjakan gegap gempita yang kita sebut reformasi ini? Demokrasi, sosialisme, Jawaisme, Islam, Protestanisme, Yahudisme, serabutanisme, atau apa?

*Ilir-Ilir*

Kanjeng Sunan Ampel seakan-akan baru hari ini bertutur. Kepada kita. Tentang kita. Tentang segala sesuatu yang kita mengalaminya sendiri. Namun tak kunjung sanggup kita mengerti.

Sejak lima abad silam syair itu ia telah lantunkan. Dan tak ada jaminan bahwa sekarang kita bisa paham. Padahal kata-kata itu mengeja kehidupan kita sendiri. Alfa beta, alif ba ta kebingungan sejarah kita dari hari ke hari.

Sejarah tentang sebuah negeri, yang puncak kerusakannya terletak pada ketidaksanggupan para penghuninya untuk mengakui betapa kerusakan itu sudah sedemikian tak terperi.

*Ilir-Ilir*, apa itu? Kipas-kipas keenakan? Atau *nglilir*-lah, bangunlah?

*Tandure wus sumilir. Tak ijo royo-royo. Tak sengguh temanten anyar.*

Menggeliatlah dari matimu, tutur Sunan. Siumanlah dari pingsan berpuluh-pulu tahun. Bangkitlah dari nyenyak tidur panjangmu. Sungguh negeri ini adalah penggalan sorga. Sorga seolah pernah bocor dan mencipratkan kekayaan dan kecantikannya. Dan cipratan kecantikannya itu bernama Indonesia Raya.

Kau bisa tanam benih kesejahteraan apa saja di atas kesuburan tanahnya yang tak terkirakan. Tak mungkin kau temukan makhluk Tuhanmu kelaparan di tengah hijau bumi kepulauan yang bergandeng-gandeng mesra ini. Bisa engkau selenggarakan dan rayakan pengantin-pengantin pembangunan lebih dari yang bisa dicapai oleh negeri-negeri lain yang manapun.

Belum lagi kalau engkau nanti melihat bahwa engkau sesungguhnya bisa mendirikan IMF-mu sendiri yang engkau ambil di rahim bumi dan lautanmu. Belum lagi kalau engkau nanti menyaksikan apa yang sebenarnya diamanatkan oleh para Aulia pemelihara pulau Jawa, bahkan oleh leluhur-leluhurmu yang justru engkau kutuk-kutuk. Belum lagi kalau engkau nanti menyadari bahwa negerimu ini bukan saja mampu dengan gampang membebaskan dirinya dari krisis dan hutang-hutang, namun bahkan bisa menjadi negeri adikuasa – seandainya SDM kita tidak berkarakter tikus-tikus...

Abacadabra sungguh kita memang telah tak mensyukuri rahmat sepenggal sorga ini. Kita telah memboroskan anugerah Tuhan ini melalui cocok tanam ketidak-adilan dan panen-panen kerakusan.

*Cah angon, cah angon penekno blimbing kuwi.* Sunan Ampel tidak menuliskan: "Ulama, Ulama," "Pak Jendral, Pak Jendral," "Intelektual, Intelektual" atau apapun lainnya, melainkan "Bocah Angon, Bocah Angon..."

Beliau juga tidak menuturkan: "Penekno sawo kuwi," atau "Penekno pelem kuwi" atau buah apapun lainnya, melainkan "Penekno blimbing kuwi."

Blimbing itu bergigir. Terserah tafsirmu apa gerakan yang dimaksud dengan lima.

Yang jelas harus ada yang memanjat “pohon licin reformasi” ini—yang sungguh-sungguh licin, sehingga banyak tokoh-tokoh yang kita sangka sudah matang dan dewasa ternyata begitu gampang terpeleset dan kini kebingungan bak layang-layang putus...

Kita harus panjat, selicin apapun, agar blimbing itu bisa kita capai bersama-sama.

Dan yang memanjat harus "Cah Angon." Tentu saja ia boleh seorang doktor, boleh seorang seniman, boleh kiai, jendral, atau siapapun saja — namun dimilikinya daya angon.

Kesanggupan untuk mengembalikan. Karakter untuk merangkul dan memesrai semua pihak. Determinasi yang menciptakan garis resultan kedamaian bersama. Pemancar kasih sayang yang dibutuhkan dan diterima oleh semua warna, semua golongan, semua kecenderungan.

Bocah Angon adalah seorang pemimpin nasional, bukan tokoh golongan atau pemuka suatu gerombolan. Bocah Angon adalah waliyullah, negarawan sejati, “orang tua yang jembar,” bukan Lowo Ijo yang gemajah, bukan Simorodra yang mengaum-aum seenak napsunya sendiri.

*Lunyu-lunyu penekno. Kanggo mbasuh dodot iro.* Sekali lagi, selicin apapun jalan reformasi ini, engkau harus jalani.... Selicin apapun pohon pohon tinggi reformasi ini sang Bocah Angon harus memanjatnya.

Harus dipanjat sampai selamat memperoleh buahnya, bukan ditebang, dirobohkan dan diperebutkan.

Air saripati blimbing lima gigir itu diperlukan oleh bangsa ini untuk mencuci pakaian nasionalnya. Konsep lima itulah sistem nilai yang menjadi wacana utama gerakan reformasi, kalau kita ingin menata semuanya ke arah yang jelas, kalau kita mau memahami segala tumpukan masalah ini dalam komprehensi konteks-konteks: kemanusiaan, kebudayaan, politik, rohani, hukum, ekonomi, sampai apapun.

Bukankah reformasi selama ini kita selenggarakan sekedar dengan acuan “nafsu reformasi” itu sendiri, tanpa bimbingan ilmu atau spiritualitas dan profesionalitas rasional apapun?

*Dodot iro, dodot iro, kumitir bedah ing pinggir. Dondomono, jlumatono, kanggo sebo mengko sore.* Pakaianlah yang membuat manusia bukan binatang. Pakaianlah yang membuat manusia bernama manusia.

Pakaian adalah akhlak, pegangan nilai, landasan moral dan sistem nilai. Pakaian adalah rasa malu, harga diri, kepribadian, tanggung jawab.

Pergilah ke pasar, lepaskan semua pakaianmu, maka engkau kehilangan segala-galanya sebagai manusia. Kehilangan harkat kemanusiaanmu, derajat sosialmu, eksistensi dan kariermu.

Semakin lebar pakaian menutupi tubuh, semakin tinggi pemakainya memberi harga kepada kemanusiaan pribadinya. Semakin sempit dan sedikit pakaian yang dikenakan oleh manusia, semakin rendah ia memberi harga kepada kepribadian kemanusiaannya.

Jika engkau berpakaian sehari-hari, engkau menjunjung harkat pribadi dan eksistensi sosialmu. Jika engkau mengenakan pakaian dinas, maka yang engkau sangga adalah harga diri dan rasa malu negara, pemerintah dan birokrasi.

Jika engkau melanggar atau mengkhianati amanat, tugas dan fungsimu sebagai pejabat negara, maka sesungguhnya engkau sedang menelanjangi dirimu sendiri.

Pakaian kebangsaan kita selama berpuluh-puluh tahun telah kita robek-robek sendiri dengan pisau pengkhianatan, kerakusan dan kekuasaan yang semena-mena – yang akibatnya justru menimpa rakyat yang merupakan juragan kita, yang menggaji kita dan membuat kita bisa menjadi pejabat.

Bukankah negara dan pejabat memerlukan rakyat untuk menjadi negara dan pejabat?  
Sementara rakyat bisa tetap hidup tanpa negara dan pejabat?

Maka *dondomono, jlumatono*, jahitlah robekan-robekan itu, utuhkan kembali, tegakkan harkat yang selama ini ambruk.

*Mumpung jembar kalangane, mumpung padhang rembulane. Yo surako surak Hiyooo!*

Dari sudut apapun, kecuali kelemahan SDM-nya, Indonesia Raya ini masih merupakan ladang masa depan yang subur, masih memancar cahaya rembulannya.

Iilir-Iilir itu karya Sunan Ampel. Aku pilih untuk dalam berbagai pertemuan dengan sesama rakyat kecil melantunkannya, sebab kami sepakat untuk tidak memilih karya Sunan Isyu, Ayatollah Surat Kaleng, Syekh Katanya, Wali Qila Wa Qala atau Imam Selebaran Gelap...

Tak usah kita perhatikan apakah ia berbahasa Jawa atau Jerman, memakai kata Arab atau Perancis. Juga tak usah berpikiran apa-apa mengenai primordialisme atau sektarianisme seandainya pun lantunan itu berbahasa planet Mars atau jin Gunung Kawi. Yang penting kita rasuki saja kemesraannya, kita resapi saja keindahannya, kita nikmati saja ketulusan hati yang dikandungnya, serta kita kita renungi saja setiap kemungkinan muatan nilainya.

Lho, kita memang sudah bangun. Kita sudah *nglilir* sesudah tidur terlalu nyenyak selama 30 tahun atau mungkin lebih lama dari itu. Kita sudah bangkit. Beribu-ribu kaum muda, berjuta-juta rakyat sudah bangkit, keluar rumah dan memenuhi jalanan.

Kita telah membanjiri sejarah dengan semangat menguak kemerdekaan yang terlalu lama diidamkan.

Bahwa karena terlalu lama tidak merdeka lantas sekarang kita tidak begitu mengerti bagaimana mengerjakan kemerdekaan, sehingga tidak paham beda antara demokrasi dengan anarki — itu soal lain.

Bahwa karena terlalu lama kita tidak boleh berpikir lantas sekarang hasil pikiran kita keliru-keliru, sehingga tidak sanggup membedakan mana asap mana api, mana emas mana loyang, mana nasi dan mana tinja — itu tidak terlalu penting.

Bahwa karena terlalu lama kita hidup dalam ketidakmenentuan nilai lantas sekarang semakin kabur pandangan kita atas nilai-nilai sehingga yang kita jadikan pedoman kebenaran adalah kemauan, nafsu dan kepentingan kita sendiri – itu bisa diproses belakangan.

Bahwa terlalu lama kita hidup dalam kegelapan sehingga sekarang tidak mengerti bagaimana mengurus cahaya terang, sehingga kita junjung pengkhianat dan kita buang pahlawan, sehingga kita bela kelicikan dan kita curigai ketulusan — itu lumrah...

Yang penting sekarang kita sedang terus berupaya menyempurnakan kemerdekaan itu. Baik kemerdekaan untuk memilih kebenaran maupun kebebasan untuk ngotot mempertahankan pendapat dan membenaran.

Baik kemerdekaan untuk bersatu maupun kebebasan untuk semakin asyik memecah belah hubungan kemanusiaan, hubungan sosial, politik dan kebudayaan kita.

Pokoknya, semakin banyak golongan yang saling bertentangan, kita merasa semakin dewasa.

Semakin banyak partai politik, rasanya semakin demokratis. Semakin banyak benturan dan perang saudara, rasanya semakin modern kita.

Kita mendadak bangun dan mendadak sudah berada di lapangan sepakbola zaman

baru, pas di depan kotak penalti yang ribut. Kemudian tiba-tiba bola masuk ke dalam gawang, dan kita bersorak-sorak riang gembira, karena kita merasa kaki kitalah yang bikin gol itu.

Namun itu tidak penting. Sebab yang utama dari Ilir-Ilir kita sekarang adalah tidak jelasnya mana gawang mana bola, siapa kiper siapa gelandang, mana wasit mana penonton.

Kita berjingkrak-jingkrak kegirangan padahal bola sedang masuk ke gawang kita sendiri. Kita bersuit-suit dan hampir mabuk padahal yang dijegal dari belakang itu adalah striker kita sendiri. Kita marah-marah kepada kiper yang dengan sigap menangkap bola pengancam gawangnya.

Pandangan mata kita sedemikian kaburnya, sehingga yang kita tatap di lapangan adalah prasangka-prasangka kita sendiri. Kemudian dengan mantap prasangka dan kecurigaan itulah yang kita jadikan dalil untuk menilai segala yang terjadi di lapangan.

Ilir-ilir. Kita sudah *nglilir*. Kita sudah bangun, sudah bangkit, bahkan kaki kita sudah berlari ke sana kemari, namun akal pikiran kita belum, hatinurani kita belum.

Kita masih merupakan anak-anak dari orde yang kita kutuk di mulut, namun kita biarkan ajaran-ajarannya terus hidup subur di dalam aliran darah dan jiwa kita.

Kita mengutuk perampok dengan cara mengincarnya untuk kita rampok balik.

Kita mencerca maling dengan penuh kedengkian kenapa bukan kita yang maling.

Kita mencaci penguasa lalim dengan berjuang keras untuk bisa menggantikannya.

Kita membenci para pembuat dosa besar dengan cara setan, yakni melarangnya untuk insaf dan bertobat.

Kita memperjuangkan gerakan anti penggusuran dengan cara mengusir.

Kita menolak pemusnahan dengan merancangan pemusnahan.

Kita menghujat para penindas dengan riang gembira sebagaimana Iblis, yakni kita halangi usahanya untuk memperbaiki diri.

Siapakah selain setan, iblis dan dajjal, yang menolak husnul khotimah manusia, yang memblokir pintu surga, yang mendorong mereka mendekat ke pintu neraka?

Sesudah ditindas, kita menyiapkan diri untuk menindas.

Sesudah diperbudak, kita siaga untuk ganti memperbudak.

Sesudah dihancurkan, kita susun barisan untuk menghancurkan.

Yang kita bangkitkan bukan pembaruan kebersamaan, melainkan asyiknya perpecahan.

Yang kita bangun bukan nikmatnya kemesraan, tapi menggelaknya kecurigaan.

Yang kita rintis bukan cinta dan ketulusan, melainkan prasangka dan fitnah.

Yang kita perbaharui bukan penyembuhan luka, melainkan rancangan-rancangan panjang untuk menyelenggarakan perang saudara.

Yang kita kembang suburkan adalah kebiasaan memakan bangkai saudara-saudara kita sendiri.

Saudara-saudara kita sendiri kita pentaskan di dalam bayangan kecurigaan kita.

Saudara-saudara kita sendiri kita beri peran fiktif di dalam asosiasi prasangka kita.

Di dalam pementasan fiktif di dalam kepala kita itu, saudara-saudara kita sendiri kita hardik, kita injak-injak, kita pukuli, kita bunuh dan akhirnya kita makan beramai-ramai.

Padahal yang kita peroleh dengan memakan bangkai itu bukan keuntungan, melainkan kesengsaraan batin dan tabungan dosa yang sama sekali tidak produktif.

Yang kita dapatkan dari memakan bangkai itu bukan sukses, melainkan penderitaan yang terus menerus di kedalaman hati kecil kita.



Kita tidak memperluas cakrawala dengan menabur cinta, melainkan mempersempit dunia kita sendiri dengan lubang-lubang kedengkian dan iri hati.

Kita adalah bumi yang menutupi cahaya matahari yang semestinya menimpa rembulan untuk kemudian dipantulkannya kepada bumi.

Kitalah penghalang cahaya rembulan yang didapatkannya dari matahari, sehingga bumi kita sendiri menjadi gelap gulita. Matahari adalah lambang Tuhan. Cahaya adalah rahmat nilai dan barakah rejekinya. Rembulan adalah Rasul, Nabi, para Wali, Ulama, pemimin-pemimpin kemanusiaan, pemerintah, lembaga-lembaga sosial, pers, tata nilai kemasyarakatan dan kenegaraan, atau apapun, yang mentransformasikan cahaya rahmat Tuhan itu agar menjadi manfaat bagi kehidupan seluruh manusia.

Tapi cahaya itu kita tutupi sendiri. Tapi informasi itu kita sampaikan secara disinformatif. Tapi cahaya terang itu kita pandang tidak layak pasar sehingga yang kita kejar-kejar adalah kegelapan, kerusakan, pembunuhan, kebohongan, pertengkaran.

Tapi cahaya Tuhan itu kita halangi sendiri. Suara Rasul kita curigai, sabda Nabi kita singkirkan, ayat-ayat kita remehkan, firman-firman kita anak tirikan – seakan-akan kita sanggup menumbuhkan bulu alis kita sampai sepuluh sentimeter.

Kita bikin landasan falsafah negara untuk kita buang dalam praktek, sehingga gerhanalah rembulan dan gelaplah kehidupan.

Kita bikin aturan main nasional untuk kita khianati sendiri, sehingga gerhanalah rembulan dan gelaplah kehidupan.

Kita bikin sistem, tatanan, batasan-batasan, untuk kita langgar sendiri, sehingga gerhanalah rembulan dan gelaplah kehidupan.

Kita bikin hiasan-hiasan budaya, lipstik hukum dan lagu pop politik, yang tidak mengakar di tanah kenyataan hidup kita, sehingga gerhanalah rembulan dan gelaplah kehidupan.

Kita biyai pekerjaan-pekerjaan besar untuk memboros-boroskan rahmat Allah, melalui manajemen pembangunan yang tidak menomersatukan rakyat, sehingga gerhanalah rembulan dan gelaplan kehidupan.

Kita selenggarakan kompetisi merampok rahmat, kolusi untuk memonopoli rahmat, pencurian dan perampokan diam-diam atau terang-terangan atas rahmat Allah yang sesungguhnya merupakan hak seluruh rakyat negeri ini, sehingga gerhanalah rembulan dan gelaplah kehidupan.

Sekarang kita harus memilih: apakah akan meneruskan fungsi sebagai bumi penutup cahaya matahari, ataukah berfungsi rembulan, yang menyorong dirinya, bergeser ke titik koordinat alam semesta sejarah yang tepat, sehingga kita peroleh kembali cahaya matahari...untuk nanti sesudah pergantian abad 20 ke 21 kita mulai sebuah Indonesia baru yang “bergelimang cahaya matahari...”

Tapi astaghfirullah, tatkala selesai kutulis semua ini, matahari sedang remang, awan menutupinya. Dan jangan-jangan keremangan matahari siang itu akan berlangsung tak kurang dari tiga minggu...

Jangan-jangan itu bukan sekedar kabut langit, melainkan kabut sejarah bangsa kayaraya yang malang ini.

21. Agustus 1998.

### A.3 ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Lir ilir Tandure wus sumilir Tak ijo royo royo Tak sengguh temanten anyar	[Vocables signifying ocean waves] The plantation is in full growth and the foliage is all green. It is a gift befitting the newlyweds.
Cah angon, Cah angon Penekno blimbling kuwi Lunyu lunyu penkeno Kanggo mbasuh dodot-iro	Young shepherd child climb that starfruit tree even though it is slippery it will help cleanse our heart,
Dodot'iro dodot'iro Lumintir bedah ing pinggir Dondomono jlumatono Kanggo sebo mengko sore	Inside my heart One side is torn. Sew it... mend it... for the wedding celebration at noon.
Mumpung jembar kalangane Mumpung padang rembulane Yo surako. Surak: Hiyyoo	While the open field reveals our blessings, While the night is bright from the full moon, Let us give praise and rejoice. Give praise and rejoice.

Can a wound as terribly deep as this one ever be healed? Maybe it's disappointment; that the decision, which slices through the hearts of tens of millions of our brothers and sisters, will one day be gone?

When we can finally crawl on our hands and knees, clambering upwards to the world from an abyss, both sheer and unfathomably deep? Do we truly know what we actually experience? Do we really understand what we are truly doing? Do we really understand if it is to the heavens that are feet are taking us? Is it true that the guilty ones are always him, her, and them? While the just ones are we, and I? Is it true, that what needs to be reformed is over there, instead of inside us? Perhaps it can only be an external reformation, and doesn't have roots in an internal reformation? Can it, in fact, currently and continuously, derive from within our hearts and even our brain cells?

What kind of value system is it that we are working towards so uproariously, that we call this reformation? Is it democracy, socialism, Javanese-ism, Islam, Protestantism, Judaism, isolationism, or what?

## *Ilir-Ilir*

It is as if the respected Sunan Ampel is speaking anew today. For us. About us. About everything that we experience individually. Yet we are never able to understand.

The poetry of *Ilir-Ilir* has reverberated throughout the past five centuries. And there is no guarantee that we can now understand it. Although in actuality, those words spell out our own lives. Alpha beta, the alphabet partakes in our history's confusion from day to day.

It tells the history of a country, damaged at its very summit, and its inhabitants, powerless to recognize the extent of the damage that is already beyond description.

*Ilir-Ilir*, what is that? Fanning yourself to your own liking? Or “nglilir,” to wake up?<sup>426</sup>

*The [sumilir] plantation is in full growth and the foliage is all green. It is a gift befitting the newlyweds.* Stretching from the slumber of your death, says Sunan. Waking from a coma of scores of years. Rising from your long, deep sleep. Truly this country is a part of heaven. As though heaven is perpetually spilling over and splashing its richness and beauty. And the splash of beauty that has emerged is named Indonesia Raya.<sup>427</sup>

You can plant any kind of seeds of prosperity in this immeasurably fertile land. You cannot find a creature of your God dying of hunger in this green archipelago of islands that sit so intimately together, side by side. Can you sustain and celebrate the development of the newlyweds more than any other country can, anywhere else?

That's not to mention if later, you see that you can establish your own IMF,<sup>428</sup> obtained from the womb of the earth and your oceans. That's not to mention if later, you witness what

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<sup>426</sup> Here, Cak Nun is making an association between the words “ilir,” meaning fan or drift, with the word “lilir” or “nglilir,” meaning to wake up.

<sup>427</sup> “Indonesia Raya” (Greater Indonesia) is also the name of the national anthem.

<sup>428</sup> International Monetary Fund.

was truly entrusted by the saints that tend the island of Java, in fact by the very ancestors that once you cursed. That's not to mention if you later realized that your country could not only easily succeed in freeing itself from its crises and debts, but in fact could become a leading superpower—if only our human resource sector<sup>429</sup> did not have the character of mice...

Abracadabra, we have truly been ungrateful for the blessing we've received in this piece of heaven. We have squandered this gift of God by sowing seeds of injustice and gathering in harvests of greed.

*Young shepherd child, climb that star fruit tree.* Sunan Ampel didn't write: Dear Ulama, Generals, Intellectuals...or anything of the sort, but instead, only *Young Shepherd Child*.

He also didn't say: "Climb that fruit tree," or "Climb that mango tree," or any other kind of fruit. Instead, he said, "Climb that star fruit tree."

The star fruit has five points. It's up to you to interpret what the five means.

What is clear is that there must be people to climb this "slippery tree of reformation"—and it truly is slippery, so much so that many figures that we imagine to be already mature and responsible adults are actually the first to run away in the present chaos and confusion, slipping away like kites with cut strings.

We must climb, however slippery it is, so that we can reach the star fruit together.

And the one who must climb must be this "Young Shepherd Child." Of course he could be a doctor, an artist, perhaps a kyai, a general, or whoever—but he has to possess the skill of a shepherd.

The ability to guide. A character that is able to embrace and unite all sides. Determination that creates a resultant line of peace together. A transmitter of love that is needed and received by all colors, all circles, all leanings. The shepherd child is a national leader, not the

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<sup>429</sup> SDM, which stands for "sumber daya manusia" (human resources).

head of a faction or the leader of a gang. The shepherd child is a guardian saint, a true statesman, a relieved parent, not the Boastful Green Bat<sup>430</sup> nor Simorodra, who bellows for his own delight.

*Even though it is slippery, it will help cleanse our heart.* Once again, however slippery this road of reformation is, you must traverse it... However slippery the tall trees of reformation are, the shepherd child must climb them.

They must be climbed until the fruit is obtained, not cut down, knocked over, or taken by force.

The people need the nectar of the five-pointed starfruit to wash their national clothes. The concept of five is a system of value that has become the main discourse in the reform movement, if we want to put everything in a clear order, if we want to understand all the different aspects of this problem, within its comprehensive contexts: humanism, culture, politics, spirituality, law, economics, or just about anything.

Hasn't reformation up until now been implemented only as far as a reference to our personal "desire of reformation," without possessing any kind of knowledge of leadership, spirituality or rational professionalism?

*Inside my heart, one side is torn. Sew it... mend it...for the wedding celebration at noon.*  
Clothing separates people from animals. Clothes make the man.

Clothes have a personality, the power to attract, a moral standard, and a value system.  
Clothes can emote shame, display individuality, and responsibility.

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<sup>430</sup> The Boastful Green Bat (Lowong yang gemagah) and Simorodra are actually scoundrels from a historical fictional tale about a hero of the Demak kingdom, Mahesa Jenar, written by S.H. Mintardja in 1966. Mahesa Jenar, a disciple of Syekh Siti Jenar, kills the two villains, but not before they both repent on their deathbeds. An English language article summarizing the story, with biographical information on the author can be found on the website Together of Story's: Kumpulan Cerita dan Dongeng Dalam Bentuk Bahasa Inggris, "The Return of Mahesa Jenar," <http://togetherofstorys.blogspot.com/2009/07/mahesa-jenar.html> (accessed July 15, 2010).

If you go to the market and remove all of your clothes, it is as if you are losing everything that makes you human. You lose your sense of human dignity, your social standing, your livelihood and your career.

The more clothes that cover your body, the more value you have as an individual person. The fewer clothes a person wears, the lower that person values their individual humanity.

If you wear your everyday clothes, you are holding your personal dignity and social identity in high esteem. If you wear a uniform, then you share in the pride and shame of your country, government and bureaucracy.

If you violate or betray your orders, duties, or function as a government official, you are actually undressing yourself.

For dozens of years, we have torn apart the clothes of our nation, ripping them apart with knives of betrayal, greed and arbitrary displays of force—the result of which has been to strike down the small entrepreneurs, the very people who have employed us and made us government officials in the first place.

Don't the government and officials need the people to become the government and officials? While the people are able to live on their own, without either government or officials? Thus, "*Sew it... mend it...*," repair what has been torn apart, make everything unified once again, and restore our collapsed dignity.

*While the open field reveals our blessings, when the night is bright from the full moon; Let us give praise and rejoice. Give praise and rejoice.*

From every angle, besides the weaknesses of the human resources sector (SDM), Indonesia Raya is still comprised of many fertile fields for the future, still spreading the light of the full moon.

“Ilir-Ilir” was composed by Sunan Ampel. I chose it after several discussions with the general public, mainly because upon reflection, we were all in agreement not to choose the works of Sunan Isyu, the Ayatollah Surat Kaleng, Sheikh Katanya, Wali Qila Wa Qala or Imam Selebaran Gelap...<sup>431</sup>

We don’t need to be concerned with whether he [Sunan Ampel] spoke Javanese or German, or wrote in Arabic or French. It also doesn’t matter whether he was a primordialist, or sectarianist, was from the planet Mars, or a jinn from Mount Kawi.<sup>432</sup> What is important is that we grasp the intimacy of the song, that we comprehend its beauty, that we take pleasure in its sincerity, and can moreover meditate upon every possibility of value suggested within the piece.

Beyond any doubt, we have already woken. We have woken<sup>433</sup> after sleeping too soundly for thirty years, maybe even longer. We have risen. Thousands of young people, millions of citizens, have risen, left their houses and begun filling the streets.

We have flooded history with a spirit that has yearned for its freedom for far too long.

Because we have been so long without our freedom, we now do not really understand what to do with our independence, even so far that we are unable to differentiate between democracy and anarchy—though that is a different problem.

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<sup>431</sup> These are all fictitious names indicating false information preceded by an Islamic title (such as Sunan Rumor, the Ayatollah Anonymous Letter, Sheikh He/She Says...).

<sup>432</sup> Mount Kawi is volcano near Malang in East Java that many Indonesians believe is the site of supernatural powers. Pilgrims travel to Mt. Kawi, seeking fortune in their business and future.

<sup>433</sup> “*Ngilir*.”



Because for too long, we were not allowed to think, consequently, the conclusions we reach now are false, and we cannot even distinguish between smoke and fire, between gold and brass, between rice and feces—but that is not so important.

Because for too long, we have lived in uncertainty of our values, consequently, our view on morality has become increasingly hazy, so that our compass of truth is that of our own will, our desires, and our own self-interests—though all that can be processed later.

Because for too long we have lived in darkness, consequently we no longer understand how to tend the resplendent light that is our charge; so instead we venerate traitors and cast aside heroes; we defend artifice and are suspicious of integrity—that is normal.

What is important now, is for us to continue in our endeavors to perfect that freedom. The freedom to either choose justice or the freedom to stubbornly defend our opinions and justifications.

The freedom either to unite or to ardently break in two our human relationships, our social, political, and cultural associations.

Essentially, the more groups that are in conflict with one another, the more we feel mature.

The more political parties there are, the greater our feeling of democracy. The more clashes and blood feuds, ethnic wars, the greater our feelings of modernity.

We are suddenly awake and all at once on a soccer field of a new era, right in front of a raucous penalty box. Then suddenly the ball enters between the goal posts and we're screaming, giddy with happiness, because we feel as if it is our own feet that made that goal.

But that is not what is important. The main point to take from “Ilir-Ilir” is that it is no longer clear what is the goal post and what is the ball, who is the goalkeeper and who is the halfback, who is the referee and who are the observers.

We jump for joy, gleeful, even though the ball has entered our own goalpost. We whistle and are almost drunk with delight even though it is our own striker who has been blocked from behind the goal line. We are furious at the goalkeeper who stands ready to take the ball from the offense at the goal line.

Our vision is covered in a fog, so that what we actually perceive in the field is our partiality. Then, with unwavering prejudice and suspicion, we create our arguments to judge everything that happens in the field.

Ilir-ilir. We have arisen. We have woken, raised ourselves up, and our feet are already off and running in every direction, only our minds and thoughts have not caught up, nor have our inner, spiritual selves.

We are still comprised of children from an order that our mouths curse, but yet we allow the teachings of that order to live fertile within our bloodstreams and souls.

We curse thieves, but keep an eye on them so that we can turn around and rob them.

We deride thieves, spiteful that we ourselves are not thieves too.

We scorn cruel tyranny, and struggle hard to overturn them.

We abhor sinners like Satan, that is to say, without allowing them to repent and atone.

We fought in movements for anti-condemnation using methods of condemnation.

We reject annihilation with tactics of annihilation.

We blaspheme against tyrants as gleefully as the devil, that is to say, we obstruct their efforts in improving themselves.

Who apart from Satan, devils or jinns would refuse salvation for mankind, would blockade the gates to heaven and push forward those approaching the gates to hell?

After being oppressed, we prepare ourselves to oppress.

After being enslaved, we are ready to exchange our places with the slavers.

After being destroyed, we arrange the path of destruction.

What we have risen is not a renewal of togetherness, but a passion for dissension.

What we have awakened is not the enjoyment of each other's company, but bitter suspicion.

What we have cleared a path for is not love and sincerity but prejudice and slander.

What we have renewed is not the healing of wounds but a long-term plan for civil war.

What we have sowed is to normalize dining on the carcasses of our own brothers and sisters.

We stage our own brothers and sisters in the shadows of our suspicions.

We give our own brothers and sisters a fictitious role to play based on our prejudices.

In the fictitious staging in our head, we snarl at our own brothers and sisters, we kick them, hit them, kill them, and finally we raucously eat them.

And yet, what we obtain from eating their corpses is not riches, but instead, inner torment and a savings account full of sin, that is definitely not productive.

What we achieve from eating their carcasses is not success but a suffering that plunges ever deeper into our consciences.

We are not widening the heavens by spreading love, but rather narrowing our own world with the depths of our suspicions and jealousy.

We are the earth that covers the sun's rays, which should have descended to the moon to be reflected back to the earth. We are an obstacle of the moon's rays, which gets its light from the sun, so that our own earth is plunged into darkness.

The sun is the symbol of God. The rays are God's mercy and the fortune of His grace. The moon is the Prophet, the Saints, the Religious Teachers, the leaders of humanity, the government, social institutions, the press, the civic and national organizations or anything, that transforms the light of God's mercy so that it becomes beneficial for the life of all humanity.

But we cover that light up with ourselves. But we only distribute that information as disinformation.

But we see that bright light as an unsuitable market, and so instead only pursue darkness, turmoil, murder, lies and dispute.

But the light of God, we personally obstruct. The voice of the prophet we suspect, the words of the prophets we evade, the verses we disparage, the commandments a child's attraction—as if we are even capable of growing our own eyebrow hair ten centimeters by ourselves.

We create a philosophical basis for the country for us to toss aside with practiced ease, so that the moon is eclipsed and life made dark.

We create national rules of play for us to personally betray, so that the moon is eclipsed and life made dark.

We create systems, regulations, limitations, for us to personally violate, so that the moon is eclipsed and life made dark.

We create cultural attractions, lipstick laws and political pop songs that have no roots in our earthly reality of our lives so that the moon is eclipsed and life made dark.

We have financed large sums to waste God's blessings, through developmental management that does not prioritize the people so that the moon is eclipsed and life made dark.

We hold competitions to rob God's blessing, collude to monopolize His Grace, steal and plunder, secretly or openly, of the grace of God, which in fact is the right of all the people in this country, so the moon is eclipsed and life made dark.

Now we must choose: will we continue our role of obscuring the sun's rays from earth, or take on the role of the moon, pushing itself, moving to a fixed coordinate in the history of the universe, so that it can reflect the sun's light... so that after the change from the twentieth to twenty-first century we can begin a new Indonesia that will be covered with the sun's light.

But may God forgive me, at the time I write all of this, the sky is overcast; the clouds cover the sun. And it doesn't seem as if the sun will shine through for at least the next three weeks...

Perhaps that isn't just a bit of fog in the sky, but the clouds hanging over this very rich but unfortunate nation.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **CAK NUN'S "GUNDUL PACUL, 'FOOLING AROUND', CENGENGESAN"**

#### **B.1 AUTHOR'S NOTE**

I have copied this writing from the book "Kiai Bejo, Kiai Untung, Kiai Hoki," published in June 2007.<sup>434</sup> Like many of Cak Nun's books, this one is a compilation of his short writings that previously appeared in other publications, mostly newspapers. As with the previous appendix, I present it here so the reader may 1) better understand my interpretation of Kiai Kanjeng's musical arrangement of the Javanese folk song "Gundul-Pacul" presented in chapter 4, and 2) draw his or her own conclusions about the relationship between song and prose in the work of this artist. The punctuation is copied exactly despite inconsistencies with the rest of this dissertation.

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<sup>434</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib, "Gundul Pacul, 'Fooling Around,' Cengengesan," in *Kiai Bejo, Kiai Untung, Kiai Hoki*. (Jakarta: Kompas, 2007), 175-81.

## B.2 THE ORIGINAL WRITING IN BAHASA INDONESIA

Siapa tahu ada manfaatnya kisah tentang *Gundul Pacul* ini bagi Anda. Ketika grup musik KK pentas keliling lima kota Mesir—Cairo, Alexandria, El-Fayoum, Tanta dan Ismailia—nomor-nomor lagu Ummi Kultsum panitia mempersoalkan kenapa saya tidak selalu tampil pentas, padahal nama saya sudah terlanjur diumumkan di setiap pemberitaan, spanduk dan katalog—terbata-bata saya menjawab: --“Karena saya lebih lancar berbicara bahasa Inggris dibanding bahasa Arab.” Dan ketika KK pentas di Australia—Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney dan Adelaide—pertanyaan yang sama nongol lagi dan saya menjawab: “karena saya lebih lancar berbahasa Arab dibanding bahasa Inggris.”

Sebagai penganggur saya sering *dolan* ke toko komputer atau *mobile-phone* (HP) untuk iseng-iseng belajar ikut *nyervis*. Itu kebiasaan saya sudah hampir 20 tahun. Selama berada di tempat servis itu saya berkata atau setidaknya saya ciptakan kesan kepada setiap teman di sana dan diam-diam kepada diri saya sendiri: “Saya sangat sibuk, acara saya sangat padat dan semua urusan besar, sehingga kalau ada luang waktu saya pergi ke sini agar hidup saya ada variasi. Juga tak baik selalu mengurus masalah nasional, ada segarnya jika diselingi mengurus masalah lokal”. Nanti kalau saya sudah berada di rumah, saya tipu diri saya sendiri dengan memaksanya percaya bahwa: “Hari ini saya sudah sangat sibuk melakukan kegiatan yang kelihatannya kecil dan sibuk melakukan kegiatan yang kelihatannya kecil dan remeh, namun sesungguhnya itu fenomenologis,” *avant gard* dan sekian langkah lebih kontemporer dibanding kebanyakan orang. Wakil Presiden atau anggota DPR saja ke sana ke mari bawa *communicator* tapi ngertinya paling pol cuma menelepon, kirim SMS dan menggunakan *Word*. Saya adalah penghuni utama era peradaban informasi dan komunikasi. Saya rekannya Bill Gate dan komunitas perkebunan Nokia.

Alasan yang sesungguhnya jelas: kalau berteman dengan orang komputer dan HP, kalau beli dikasih murah. Alasan yang nyata dari kenapa saya tidak tampil dengan KK di Mesir dan Aussie sudah dimafhumi semua orang bahwa saya memang tidak becus bermusik, tak bisa nyanyi, apalagi memetik gitar atau sekadar memukul saronpun. Tetapi toh saya cukup pandai untuk berlagak: setiap kali KK mendapatkan *a long standing ovation*, tepuk tangan panjang sambil berdiri dan meminta persembahan dilanjutkan—saya sigap berlari ke panggung dan ikut berbaris dengan KK.

Orang yang tak punya peran harus pintar-pintar “*caper*” (cari perhatian). Kalau artis atau Menteri diwawancarai di tengah keramaian, Anda harus segera menerobos untuk tengah keramaian, Anda harus segera menerobos untuk menongolkan wajah Anda di kiri-kanan Menteri agar tampak di kamera. Setelah itu kalau ada wartawan terjebak jalan sesat dengan mewawancarai Anda, perlu Anda susun kalimat-kalimat yang menimbulkan kesan bahwa seluruh prestasi itu bermula dari tangan jenius Anda. Hindarkan kejaran cerdas wartawan yang mau bukti, terus cocor saja “*image*” *self building* diri dikau. Kita sedang hidup di tengah “masyarakat kesan,” di tengah “bangsa kayaknya,” *The Image Society*, bukan masyarakat realitas. Kita memilih presiden berdasarkan kesan, bukan pemahaman tentang kenyataan. Kita juga bisa “membunuh” orang lain yang tak pernah berurusan dengan kita cukup dengan membangun kesan tentang dia dalam hati kita sepanjang hidup. Mampuslah dia.

Dan di toko-toko komputer dan *mobile-phone* itu realitas yang sebenarnya adalah bahwa saya seorang penganggur, dan terus tetap penganggur sampai usia lewat setengah abad sekarang ini. Tetapi penganggur jangan berpuas diri sebagai penganggur. Penganggur harus punya lagak. Rugi kalau Anda menganggur lantas tampil rendah diri. Bodoh kalau Anda miskin lantas hati bersedih dan kalau berjalan tidak tegak dan wajah tidak menunjukkan kepercayaan diri.



Sudahlah miskin, minder dan merasa sengsara pula. Yang terbaik bagi orang miskin yang penganggur adalah fenomena sikap *gemlelengan*, atau bahasa jalannya “cengengesan.” Jadi, sampailah kita pada *Gundul Pacul*.

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Gundul itu botak. Pacul itu cangkul. Tak ada kaitan literer antara gundul dengan pacul dalam idiom Jawa gundul pacul. Itu peng-enak-an bunyi belaka. Tak perlu ditafsirkan bahwa kepala kita menjadi botak sesudah dicangkuli oleh tetangga. Paralel dengan istilah *uuwakehe suwidak jaran*, banyaknya sampai 60 kuda. Tak usah dihitung berdasar angka 60. Atau “malam seribu bulan,” belum tentu pas kalau Lailatul Qodar Anda hitung melalui jumlah hari, jam, menit dan detik dalam seribu bulan. Idiom Allah itu lebih bersifat kualitatif: kara “seribu” menggambarkan hampir tak terbatasnya peluang pemaknaan di balik idiom itu. Juga bersifat dinamis bergantung pada pola pergerakan hubungan antara Tuhan dengan hamba-Nya.

Gundul Pacul mungkin menggambarkan karakterisasi anak, pemuda, atau manusia tertentu—memalui mata pandang dan rasa budaya Jawa. Gundul pacul adalah anak yang nakal pol, --*mbulunat*, *mbethik*, *mbeling*, susah diatur, berlaku seenaknya sendiri. Main sana main sini, teriak sana teriak sini, ambil makanan siapa saja di meja senafsu-nafsu dia, pergi ke sungai dan mandi *bluron* sampai kulitnya bersisik, lomba lari mengejar layang-layang putus sambil mengusap ingus. Intinya: punya bakat dan naluri anarkisme yang serius.

Di Arab zaman dahulu ada seorang pemuda bernama Nuaim yang heboh benar gundul paculnya. Tak ada kata Ibu Bapaknya kecuali ia bantah. Tak ada larangan orangtuanya kecuali ia langgar. Tak ada perintah mereka berdua atau bahkan siapapun kecuali ia tabrak. Pada suatu hari Bapaknya melihat Nuaim berjalan jauh ke tengah padang pasir. Bapaknya yang sangat berpengalaman tahu persis anaknya sedang ditunggu bahaya besar. Kalau Nuaim teruskan

berjalan ke arah itu, ia akan ditiup oleh fatamorgana sehingga beberapa langkah kemudian ia akan terjerumus masuk pasir bergelombang dan ditelan bumi tanpa bekas.

Betapa gundul paculpun putranya, sang Bapak tetaplah mencintainya. Maka Bapaknya berteriak: “Nuaiiim! Teruuuuus!” Itu adalah sebuah metode empirikal berdasarkan pengalaman atas watak anaknya. Kalau dibilang “Stop,” maka ia akan terus, sehingga agar ia stop harus dibilang “Teruuuuus!” Akan tetapi *subhanallah* Nuaim siang itu mendapat hidayah dari Allah swt. Tiba-tiba ia bergumam dalam hati: “Ya Allah ampunilah kenakalanku yang selalu membantah dan menyakiti hati orangtuaku. Setidaknya satu kali ini perkenankan aku mematuhi perintah Bapakku”.

Anda tidak memerlukan keterangan lebih lanjut untuk mengetahui apa yang kemudian terjadi pada Nuaim. Dendangkanlah saja lagu kuno itu: “*Gundul gundul pacul cul, gemelelengan....*” Nakal tapi sok benar. Tak mau belajar tapi sok pandai. Kelakuannya seenaknya tapi sok suci. Tak punya apa-apa tapi gemelelengan, berlagak, *petentang-petentang*. Tak becus menjadi pemerintah tapi tak punya rasa malu. Tak mampu berbuat apa-apa, bahkan menyusun kalimat sajapun tak lancar, tapi wajahnya tegak dan malah merasa bangga—itu persis saya yang tidak ikut pentas tapi nyerobot ikut menyongsong *standing ovation* di panggung pertunjukan.

Sudah terbukti tak punya kemampuan managerial mengurus umat, tapi merasa pantas dicitum tangannya. Sudah jelas kerjanya hanya berkonsentrasi menghimpun sogokan-sogokan uang, tapi tetap meyakini bahwa dirinya adalah wakil rakyat. Sudah jelas bahwa pejabat itu buruhnya rakyat, malah berperilaku seakan-akan ia boss-nya rakyat. Sudah dilalapnya gaji dari uang rakyat, ditambah uang curian ribuan kali lipat gajinya, tetap saja tidak mau tahu bahwa yang menggaji adalah boss, yang digaji adalah buruh. Sudah jelas rakyat mau berkorban membiayai triliunan rupiah untuk institusi yang kerjanya adalah menghimpun kekayaan pribadi

dan memecah belah rakyat, tetap saja mereka tidak pernah mengakui bahwa hidupnya telah salah niat dan berpikiran sesat.

Yang seharusnya butuh belajar, malas belajar. Yang rajin belajar, keliru memilih apa yang dipelajari. Yang tak salah menemukan sesuatu yang dipelajari, salah caranya mempelajari. Yang jelas-jelas maling puluhan tahun dijunjung-junjung, dibukakan akses dan ekspose. Yang tak ikut apa-apa, yang mencari makan sendiri di liang-liang tikus di hutan rimba, malah dipentaskan sebagai maling nasional, dan itu diumumkan setiap siang dan malam, minimal di ruang-ruang dalam hati masing-masing. Sungguh ada perbedaan sangat serius, mendalam dan ideologis antara Indonesia Karangan alias Indonesia Kesan, dengan Indonesia Kenyataan. Memilih lagu yang sehat saja kita tak becus, bagaimana memilih Presiden.

Yang tak benar-benar mengerti Agama, sangat canggih memperdagangkan Agama. Yang mengerti Agama malah bersedia menjadi budak dari pedagang Agama. Yang pelawak dan penyinden yakin bahwa merekalah presenter utama pekerjaan dakwah, sementara yang kiai dan ulama bersedia menjadi pekatiknya pelawak dan penyinden di lapangan dakwah. Yang baik moralnya, bodoh otaknya. Yang pandai akalinya, jahat hatinya. Yang intelektual, tak mampu bekerja. Yang sanggup bekerja, tidak pernah mau belajar. Yang berhasil menjadi manusia baik dan pandai, pengecut mentalnya. Reformasi berlangsung sampai busuk sebusuk-busuknya sampai tak terhitung jauhnya melampaui kebusukan-kebusukan yang pernah dicapai oleh sejarah bangsa ini, tapi tak seorangpun siap ambil oper menanggung malu moral, malu mental, malu intelektual, apalagi malu spiritual. Dasar *gemelelengan*! Cengengesan!

Anda mengerti kalimat berikutnya dari lagu kuno itu: “*Nyunggi nyunggi wakul kul, gemelelengan...*” *Nyunggi* adalah membawa sesuatu dnengan meletakkannya di atas kepala. Yang di-sunggi adalah *wakul*. Bakul tempat nasi. Nasi adalah amanat kesejahteraan rakyat,

kepercayaan sangat mahal untuk menciptakan masyarakat adil makmur. Bakul adalah otoritas, legalitas dan legitimasi pemerintahan, yang ditempuh dan dipersembahkan oleh rakyat dengan biaya yang sangat mahal: uang raksasa jumlahnya, perpecahan massa, nyawa-nyawa melayang, kebodohan berkepangjangan dan ketidaksungguhan hidup bernegara dan berbangsa yang bertele-tele.

Bakul tempat nasi itu tak sekadar ditenteng dengan tangan, apalagi ditaruh dalam ransel di belakang punggung. Amanat itu sedemikian tinggi dan sakral maknanya sehingga diletakkan di atas kepala. Ditaruh di lapisan harkat yang lebih tinggi dari kepala individu kita sendiri. Diposisikan pada derajat yang lebih mulia dibanding kepentingan diri sendiri, golongan dan apapun saja dalam skala kehidupan berbangsa dan bernegara. *Nyunggi wakul* itu pekerjaan paling mulia. Dan dalam pekerjaan *nyunggi wakul* itu tetap saja kita bertindak *gemelelengan*. Tetap saja kita berlagak-lagak. Tidak sungguh-sungguh. Akting sana akting sini. Palsu luar, palsu dalam. *Fooling around*. Berbodoh-bodoh berdungu-dungu beriseng-iseng dulu, kemarin, hari ini dan besok. Politik kita mainkan. Kesakralan kata “rakyat” kita manipulasikan. Moral dan nurani kita remehkan. Agama kita akali. Tuhan kita tipu.

Akhirnya—“*Wakul ngglimpang, segane dadi sak latar...*” Bakul amanat kesejahteraan rakyat itu terjatuh dari kepala kita, tercampak di tanah, nasinya tumpah dan berceceran di halaman negeri indah ini. Seharusnya padi ditumbuh-kembangkan, nasi didistribusikan dalam keadilan. Tapi ini tumpah dan berceceran.

Tampaknya langkah kita sekarang adalah berteriak kepada “Nuaim” yang berjalan menuju jurang: “Teruuuus! Teruuus!” Tapi mungkin ternyata Nuaim itu adalah kita sendiri yang gundul pacul, *fooling around*, cengengesan...\*

### B.3 ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Who knows, there might be a useful narrative in the song “Gundul Pacul” for you. When the music group Kiai Kanjeng performed in five cities in Egypt—Cairo, Alexandria, El-Fayoum, Tante and Ismailia—performing a number of Umm Kulthum songs, the committee inevitably discussed why I did not always appear on stage, even though my name always appeared on all the announcements, in every press release, flyer, and pamphlet. Hesitantly, I answered: “It’s because my English is much more fluent than my Arabic.” And when Kiai Kanjeng performed in Australia—in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Adelaide—the same question would appear again, and I would answer: “It’s because my Arabic is much more fluent than my English.”

When I was unemployed, I would often hang out at the computer shops or the cell-phone stalls, to informally learn how to service the devices. It’s been a pastime of mine for almost twenty years. Whenever I was in these repair shops, I would say or at the least I would create the impression for all my friends there, and even secretly to myself, “I’m a busy person. I have a very full agenda, and it’s all important business, and so if I have any free time, I just stop by so that my life has at least some variation. Also, its not useful to always be concerned only with national problems, actually it is sometimes refreshing to deal with local problems.” Later, when I’d return home, I’d trick myself into believing: “Today, I was very busy with activities that may have seemed small and trivial, but were actually quite philosophical, avant garde, and more modern than other people. The vice president, or even the congressman, travel all over with their fancy wireless devices and at the most only understand how to make a phone call, send a text message and use Word. But I dwell in the age of information and technology. I am a colleague of Bill Gates and the Nokia corporate community.”

The reason is quite clear: if you are friends with computer and phone people, then when you are ready to buy something, they will give you a good deal. The real reason why I never appeared with Kiai Kanjeng in Egypt or Australia is that I am not actually very musical. I cannot sing, play guitar, or even play the saron. But I am pretty clever at putting on airs; every time Kiai Kanjeng received a long, standing ovation, I very proficiently ran onstage and joined the ranks of Kiai Kanjeng.

People without a position must be clever at seeking attention.<sup>435</sup> If an artist or cabinet member is being interviewed in the middle of a large crowd, you must be ready to immediately jump in, so that you are surrounded by ministers and get your face in the camera. Then, the reporter will be forced to ask you a few questions as well. You must be ready with a few words that will give the impression that everything that has been achieved is actually because of your own genius. Avoid the sharp-witted reporter who wants proof; instead strike at the one concerned with building self-image. We live in the center of a community that is only concerned with impressions, likenesses. It is a nation of images, an “Image Society,” that is unconcerned with realities. We choose our presidents based upon our impressions, rather than any true understanding. We could “kill” somebody who never had anything to do with us, based only our suppositions, or a prejudice that we may have held our whole lives. Just destroy them.

And when I was in the computer and phone shops, in reality, I had no job, and even now, more than fifty years later, I still have no job. But if you don’t have a job, you shouldn’t just be satisfied being unemployed. The unemployed must also have a positive outlook. It is your loss if you’re unemployed and you appear to have low self-confidence. It is silly if, because you have no money, you feel sad, and you walk slumped over, and your face shows how you don’t believe in yourself. You’re already poor, there’s no reason to feel miserable also. The best

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<sup>435</sup> “Ca-Per” (cari perhatian).

attitude for the poor person is to adopt the attitude of “gemlelengan,” or in the language of the street, fooling around. This brings us back to *Gundul Pacul*.

Gundul means bald. Pacul is a hoe. There isn’t any literal connection between the words “gundul” and “pacul,” or “baldness” and “hoe,” in the Javanese idiom “gundul pacul.” It is a phrase based solely on the appeal of the sounds. There is no need to interpret how our heads become bald after being hoed by our neighbors. It is similar to the phrase, “uuwakehe suwidak jaran,” which means “as many as sixty horses.” It doesn’t mean that you have to count to exactly sixty objects. Or even the “night of a thousand moons [Lailatul Qodar, the most sacred night of Ramadan, though no one can predict its specific date],” it’s not certain to be Lailatul Qodar,<sup>436</sup> even if you calculate each of the days, hours and minutes in a thousand months. Allah’s idiom is more of a qualitative description: the word “thousand” implies the almost infinite possibilities of meaning behind the phrase.

Maybe “Gundul Pacul” depicts the nature of a child, a teenager, or a certain man—through the viewpoint and sensitivity of Javanese culture.<sup>437</sup> “Gundul Pacul” is a very naughty child—badly behaved and mischievous,<sup>438</sup> ill-disciplined, acting however he wants. Playing all over the place, screaming all over the place, grabbing food from other peoples plates to his heart’s content. He swims in the river<sup>439</sup> until his skin is all wrinkly; he races to catch the flyaway kite, at the same time he’s wiping his nose. Essentially, he has both the talent and instinct of a serious anarchist.

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<sup>436</sup> Qur’an 97:1-5 as follows: In the name of God, the Benevolent, the Merciful. 1. Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Predestination. 2. Ah, what will convey unto thee what the Night of Power is! 3. The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. 4. The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with all decrees. 5. (The night is) Peace until the rising of the dawn.

<sup>437</sup> The child is gender neutral in Emha’s prose; however for greater ease in reading, I’ve chosen masculine pronouns based upon his narrative example in the subsequent paragraph.

<sup>438</sup> Here, he inserts the Javanese words “mblunat, mbethik, mbeling.”

<sup>439</sup> “Bluron.”

In ancient Arabia, there was a child named Nuaim who was a perfect example of this “Gundul Pacul.” There wasn’t a word from his parents that he didn’t protest. There wasn’t a rule that his parents gave him that he didn’t disobey. There wasn’t an order they could give him that he wouldn’t contest. One day, his father saw him walking very far into the middle of the desert. Now his father knew precisely the danger that awaited his son. If Nuaim continued to walk in that direction, he would be deceived by a mirage and in just a few more steps, he would fall into a billow of sand and be swallowed by the earth in seconds.

As this “Gundul Pacul” was his son, in spite of everything his dear father loved him. So of course, he screamed to him, “Nuaiim! Keep going! Don’t stop!” It was an empirical approach, based on his experiences dealing with his child. If he had shouted “Stop!” then his son would have kept walking; if he wanted him to stop then his father would really have to say “Keep going!” But that very afternoon, *subhanallah*,<sup>440</sup> Nuaim had received divine guidance from Allah, swt.<sup>441</sup> Suddenly, he whispered in his heart: “Please God, forgive me my wickedness, for I always contradict and hurt my parents’ feelings. Just this once, let me obey my father’s orders.”

You don’t need me to finish the story to figure out what happened to Nuaim. Just sing the old song: “*Gundul gundul pacul cul, gemelelengan...*” Naughty, but you pretend to be good. Never wanting to study, but you pretend to be smart. Behaving however you want, but you pretend to be pure. Having nothing but foolishness, putting on airs, with your hands on your hips. Incompetent in the affairs of the government, and having no sense of shame. You can’t do anything, in fact you’re not even articulate, but you hold your head high and even feel proud—

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<sup>440</sup> Arabic, meaning “Praise be to God,” but often inserted in colloquial speech to express surprise at something.

<sup>441</sup> Swt. is written after God’s name, standing for “subhanahu wa taala,” meaning “The Almighty and most worthy of praise.”



that is precisely why I never joined in the performance but happily joined in the standing ovation on the performance stage.

It is obvious that he possesses no managerial skills to preside over the people, and yet it still feels appropriate to show respect, like a child towards its elders. It is obvious that he is spending all his concentration on collecting bribes, but he is still confident that he is representing the people. It is obvious that the government official works for the people, but still he acts as though he is the boss of the people. After consuming his earnings from the people, he increases his salary a thousand times over with stolen money, and is still unwilling to recognize that the one paying the salary is the boss while the one getting paid the salary is the employee. It is obvious that the people are willing to sacrifice trillions of rupiah<sup>442</sup> for a working institution that will assemble the wealth of the individuals and redistribute it amongst the people; and yet they are unable to recognize the false intentions and incoherent thinking of their leaders.

The ones that have the most to learn are too lazy to study. The ones who study hard choose to study the wrong things. The ones who choose the right things to study use faulty methods. The most obvious thieves were held in great esteem for years and given high access and important introductions. The ones who never did anything, who only sought to make their own lives in the streets and jungles were paraded as thieves of the nation; it was announced by day and night, though less in the hearts of the individual. There is a very serious difference, profound and ideological, between the Narrative of Indonesia, otherwise known as the Impression of Indonesia, and the Reality of Indonesia. If we can't even choose a healthy song to sing, how will we be able to choose a president?

Those who don't really understand religion are very clever at the business of religion. Those who do understand religion are instead more than ready to become the slaves of the

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<sup>442</sup> Indonesian currency.

businessmen of religion. The comedians and singers are sure that they are the main broadcasters of Islamic preaching,<sup>443</sup> while the religious teachers and scholars become the broadcasters for the comedians and singers through their preaching. Those with good morals are dimwitted. The clever are malicious. The intellectuals are incapable of work. The ones who can work don't want to learn. And the ones who actually manage to become both good and smart are mental cowards. Those reforms that did take place quickly spiraled into depravity, until the depravity stretched into a sense of infinite shame that had yet been unknown in this nation's history, and yet, not one person was ready to take up this feeling of moral shame, mental shame, intellectual shame, let alone spiritual shame. That is the nature of *gemelelengan*!

You understand the next sentence of the folk song: *Nyunggi nyunggi wakul-kul, gemelelengan...* *Nyunggi* means to carry something by placing it on the top of your head. What is carried is called a *wakul*, a basket, specifically for carrying rice. Rice is the mandate, entrusted for the prosperity of the people, the costly belief necessary for creating a just and prosperous community. The basket represents the authority, the law, and the legitimacy of the government that has endured and is dedicated for the people at great expense: a colossal amount of money, dissension amongst the masses, lost souls, protracted ignorance and an uncertainty of life in a list of country and nation-building costs that goes on and on.

The basket of rice is not just carried by our hands or even placed in a backpack and slung over our shoulder. The mandate is so high and sacred, it means we must place it on the head. It is located on a level of dignity that is higher even than our own individual heads. It is positioned on a nobler plane, even when compared with self-interests, factions, or anything located within the realm of nation or country. *Nyunggi wakul*, to carry the mandate upon one's head, is the noblest of work. And having that job, we still act *gemelelengan*, foolishly. We continue to put

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<sup>443</sup> "Dakwah."

on airs. We're insincere. Acting here and there. False without, and false within. Fooling around. Pretending to be stupid, dimwitted, doing things just for the fun of it, yesterday, today and tomorrow. We make a fool of politics. We manipulate the sacredness in the word "nation." We devalue morality and purity. We deceive religion. We con God.

And finally, we come to the last line: "*Wakul ngglimpang, segane dadi sak latar.*" The basket entrusted to us, the prosperity of the people, has fallen from our heads, discarded on the ground; the rice has spilled, scattered over the pages of our beautiful country's history. It should be replanted, nurtured, and the rice redistributed with justice. But instead, it has been spilt and scattered.

Ostensibly, our next step should be to scream to "Nuaim" as he is walking straight towards the chasm, "Keep going! Don't stop!" But, just maybe, we are not actually the father of the story, but instead are Nuaim, the "gundul pacul," walking heedlessly forward, fooling around.

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